

SAVING GOD'S REPUTATION : THE THEOLOGICAL
FUNCTION OF 'PISTIS IESOU' IN THE COSMIC
NARRATIVES OF REVELATION

Sigve K. Tonstad

A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD
at the
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Saving God's Reputation

**The Theological Function of *Pistis Iesou* in the
Cosmic Narratives of Revelation**

A thesis
submitted in fulfilment of the requirements
for the Ph.D. degree in New Testament studies
St. Mary's College
University of St. Andrews

By

Sigve K. Tonstad

7 December 2004



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Abstract

Scholars generally see the aspiration of the Roman Empire and the imperial cult in Asia Minor as God's chief antagonists in Revelation, treating the depiction of a cosmic conflict in the book mostly as metaphors that hold little or no explanatory power in the story. In this thesis I pursue the complementary and partly contrary conviction that the cosmic conflict imagery is the primary and controlling element in the account. Such a reading puts the war-in-heaven theme in the foreground, calling on interpreters to pay far more attention to the illustrious heavenly being whose attempt to subvert the truth about the divine government is the unremitting concern in Revelation. My first aim is therefore to redress the distortion that results from leaving the larger conflict theme underexposed. Having first developed the story line, I next aim to show that the phrase *pistis Iesou* in Revelation is best understood when Revelation is read as a theodicy of God's handling of the reality of evil, expressing on the one hand 'the faithfulness of Jesus' in the unmasking of evil, and on the other hand his faithful disclosure of God's character. In the form of a slaughtered Lamb Jesus brings God's maligned character to light, thereby saving God's embattled reputation, and against this wholly unexpected manifestation the slanderous and subversive design of the cosmic adversary is to no avail. *Pistis Iesou*, understood as the legacy of 'the faithfulness of Jesus,' stands as the defining and preserving element when the forces of deception bring their final effort to bear on believers in Revelation. I conclude that *pistis Iesou* understood as 'the faithfulness of Jesus' reflects the concern of Revelation better than the three interpretations currently in use, "the faith of Jesus," "faith in Jesus," or "faithfulness to Jesus."

Part One

Conceptual Framework and Method

CHAPTER ONE

THE REACH OF *PISTIS IESOU* IN REVELATION

The Aim of the Study

It is the intention of this thesis to show that the meaning of *pistis Iesou* in Revelation is best understood when Revelation is read as a theodicy of God's handling of the reality of evil from its inception to its demise, expressing on the one hand 'the faithfulness of Jesus' in the unveiling of the character of evil, and on the other hand his faithful disclosure of God's character. The text that constitutes the centre of the study is Revelation 14:12, "Ὡδε ἡ ὑπομονὴ τῶν ἁγίων ἐστίν, οἱ τηροῦντες τὰς ἐντολὰς τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὴν πίστιν Ἰησοῦ. This text comes in the form of a conclusion, intended as an exhortation or exclamation in the context of the final showdown between good and evil in Revelation's view of history. It assumes that a challenge has been raised against God's ways and authority, and that the nature of that challenge is manifesting itself in the warp and woof of historical time.

The interpretation I wish to defend does not see this conflict merely as a controversy that will be resolved by God imposing his sovereign will on rebellious elements in the universe. God's *method* is the crucial issue in the drama. Since the issue in the conflict revolves around the kind of person God is, the winner of the battle is not determined simply on the basis of power and might, and a more subtle and circumspect reading is therefore required. In Revelation God's leading adversary is called "the great dragon, ...the ancient serpent, ...the Devil and Satan," said to be "the deceiver of the whole world" (12:9). This disclosure explains why the antagonist in the conflict cannot be brought to heel by force. The deceiver must be *unmasked*, and the task of doing that has in Revelation been accomplished by Jesus in the form of a Lamb that looks "as if it had been slaughtered" (5:6). He is the definitive manifestation of God's character in history. The expression *pistis Iesou* (14:12) is inextricably linked to, and defined by, the slaughtered Lamb. This

manifestation encompasses the twofold mission of unmasking the deceiver on his own terms and of unveiling what God is like in a way that wins the confidence and admiration of the entire universe (4:8; 5:9-13; 11:17; 15:2-4; 19:1, 2, 5-7). Placing τὰς ἐντολάς τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὴν πίστιν Ἰησοῦ at the centre of this drama connects the faithfulness of Jesus to the ways of God. This connection also links God's victory over evil to the stance of the believer against powerful and bewitching forces in the contemporary world.

It will be noted that I have chosen the subjective genitive reading of the phrase *pistis Iesou*, and the informed reader will surmise that the translation of *pistis Iesou* as including a subjective genitive option may have been influenced by the extensive and sometimes heated discussion of the *pistis Christou* language in Paul in recent scholarship.¹ However, it cannot be assumed that Revelation's use of this term parallels that of Paul. If this study concludes in favour of the subjective genitive interpretation, the basis for this conclusion is likely to hinge on a perspective that is unique to Revelation. Moreover, the broader aim of the inquiry will not depend entirely on reading *pistis Iesou* as a subjective genitive. I hope to work out the contextual framework of this verse convincingly enough that the translation of *pistis Iesou* will tolerate any one of four main alternatives, 'the faithfulness of Jesus,' 'the faith of Jesus,' 'faith in Jesus,' or 'faithfulness to Jesus,' even though one of these options will be preferred. The case for reading Revelation as theodicy lies at the heart of this approach, and if successful, the larger picture then emerging will tend to defuse the constricting effect of picking one wording before another.

¹ See Richard B. Hays, *The Faith of Jesus Christ: An Investigation of the Narrative Substructure of Galatians 3:1-4:11* (SBLDS 56; Chico: Scholars Press, 1983; 2. ed., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002). Hays' book has probably been the single most influential factor for the upsurge of interest in the subject since the time of its publication. For my review of the *pistis Christou* debate, see my, "Πίστις Χριστοῦ: Reading Paul in A New Paradigm," *AUSS* 40 (2002), 37-59.

Interpreting the Book of Revelation

What a reader takes away from Revelation is a matter of interpretation, and interpretations are at least as numerous and diverse as the seven-headed beast that came up from the sea.² The view of John J. Collins is not atypical; even though he points to the poetic and allusive character of apocalyptic literature, he takes the picture of Jesus in Revelation to be completely at odds with the Jesus of the Gospels and more in line with the Jewish expectation of the militant Messiah that Jesus did not fulfil in his earthly life. To Collins, the message of Revelation “is the projection into the future of what was unfulfilled in the past. Jesus did not destroy the wicked in his earthly life, but he would return with supernatural power to complete the task.”³ According to this view, the God of Revelation is a God of retributive justice, and Revelation narrates the delayed assertion of divine sovereignty over the forces of evil until these powers are crushed.

However, many features in Revelation suggest that it is possible and even necessary to pursue a reading that sees quite different means at work in accomplishing the triumph it describes. Conceding with Hildegard Gollinger that no book in the Bible is so in need of staking out the difference between *Auslegung* and *Deutung*,⁴ there are numerous hints in the text encouraging the reader to probe the meaning of its symbols and make the distinction between appearance and reality. “The simple notion that a text means what it says is always inadequate, but with Revelation is always wrong. Revelation does not mean what it says, it

² The beast from the sea has seven heads, but John M. Court (*Myth and History in the Book of Revelation* [London: SPCK, 1979], 2-15) has identified at least eight major approaches or schools of thought as to how Revelation may be interpreted. In addition, interpretations vary greatly within each category. The eight categories are as follows: 1. the Chilastic interpretation as reflected in the Millenarian expectation of Montanism; 2. the ‘Alexandrian’ approach with its extreme allegorisation; 3. the Recapitulation theory of Victorinus of Pettau and the Donatist Tyconius; 4. the Historical applications theory seeing a *weltgeschichtlich* or *kirchengeschichtlich* application such as espoused by Joachim of Fiore; 5. the Eschatological or *endgeschichtlich* approach as in dispensational schemes; 6. the Contemporary-Historical or *zeitgeschichtlich* view that is held by most critical scholars; 7. Literary analytic approaches; 8. views that rely on comparative studies in a history of religion or history of tradition mode of thought.

³ John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination* (2d. ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 278.

⁴ Hildegard Gollinger, *Das "grosse Zeichen" von Apokalypse 12* (Stuttgart: Echter Verlag, 1971), 17.

means what it means,” David Barr says somewhat tongue-in-cheek.⁵ This should not be taken to imply that determination of meaning is out of reach, but it is a reminder that a *prima facie* reading is inadequate. The task of interpretation is not optional. If at times it will seem tedious to observe this requirement faithfully – always stating what a text says and then asking what it means – the tone and texture of Revelation will frown on any attempt to short-circuit this requirement. Its disclosures are reserved for “anyone who has an ear” (2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22; 13:9), and it calls for a mind that has wisdom (13:18; 17:9). No one can shirk the injunction that calls on the reader to get it right. Revelation is in the business of “aural circumcision,”⁶ and its disclosures depend not only on what is said but also on what is heard.

A number of factors make the proposition that the Jesus in Revelation is embarking on another mission than Jesus of the rest of the New Testament an unattractive hypothesis. Of the many titles of Jesus in Revelation, the one by which he is identified most extensively is “the Lamb.” τὸ ἀρνίον, Anton Vögtle shows, is “the most frequently utilised and comprehensive title of honour of Jesus Christ,” numbering twenty-eight instances.⁷ The force of this mode of speech does not only lie in the very word used but also in its reflection of the depiction of Jesus in other books in the New Testament. “Look! He is coming with the clouds; every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and on his account all the tribes of the earth will wail,” exclaims the narrator in Revelation (Rev 1:7). This verse

⁵ David Barr, *Tales of the End. A Narrative Commentary on the Book of Revelation* (Santa Rosa: Poleridge Press, 1998, 4).

⁶ The term is borrowed from Frank Kermode (*The Genesis of Secrecy: On the Interpretation of Narrative* [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979], 3). “Aural circumcision” in Revelation is implied in the call that echoes throughout the messages to the seven churches, ὁ ἔχων οὐς ἀκουσάτω τί τὸ πνεῦμα λέγει ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις as noted in Rev 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22 and by the emphatic Εἴ τις ἔχει οὐς ἀκουσάτω in 13:9.

⁷ Anton Vögtle, “Der Gott der Apokalypse,” in *La Notion biblique de Dieu* (ed. J. Coppens; Gembloux: Éditions J. Duculot, 1976), 386-87.

creates a remarkable convergence with the piercing of Jesus in order to verify the fact of his death in the Gospel of John (19:34-37), one alluding to Zechariah and the other quoting it (Zech 12:10). While it cannot be shown that the author of Revelation had the narrative of the Gospel in mind when he used this expression, it demonstrates common ground. In both instances meaning is forged by harnessing the same Old Testament passage, and with what appears to be a similar intent.

As is well known, the various documents comprising the New Testament are not only disinterested records of historical events. They are also sustained efforts at persuasion. The veracity of the events reported is only one of the issues addressed. Inextricably linked to the life and significance of Jesus, is the question of Jesus as the Messiah, organically linked to the Old Testament to the extent that he shares the identity of the Old Testament God (John 1:1, 18; 20:31).⁸ It is a striking feature of this body of literature that Jesus is seen to differ from what was expected (John 5:39; 6:30-31; 1 Cor 2:7-8). Ultimately, the discrepancy between expectation and reality becomes so unbearable that it stands at the centre of why he is rejected (Mark 14:61-63; John 5:18; Acts 3:17). To the New Testament writers, however, the reason for this discrepancy lies in the human perception and not in the Old Testament or its reported continuation and fulfilment in Christ. A veil lies over the mind of readers who do not make this connection (2 Cor 3:14-16), and the removal of this veil, described in a different context as “the conversion of the imagination,”⁹ lies at the heart of the colossal task of persuasion that constitutes the New Testament.

⁸ Richard Bauckham, *God Crucified: Monotheism and Christology in the New Testament* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1998). Richard Hays (*Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989], 35) goes so far as to make the Old Testament Paul’s main partner in dialogue in Romans as though enlisting the support of scripture is his main priority. “Once the conversation begins, the addressees recede curiously into the background, and Paul finds himself engaged with an older and more compelling partner,” that partner being the Old Testament.

⁹ Richard B. Hays, “The Conversion of the Imagination: Scripture and Eschatology in 1 Corinthians,” *NTS* 45 (1999), 391-412.

Does Revelation represent a departure from this New Testament trajectory? Is the Jesus of Revelation the exception from the persuasive task seen elsewhere in the New Testament in the sense that in Revelation the Old Testament imagery finally conforms to the Messiah of the prior expectation? Does this book offer relief from the arduous task of extracting meaning that is not obvious? Is the reader of Revelation absolved from 'the conversion of the imagination' that is required in the other books of the New Testament? Is the resolution to the original discrepancy between expectation and reality resolved by "the projection into the future of what was unfulfilled in the past"¹⁰ and in that sense offering at least partial vindication of the failed initial expectation?

The present study takes the approach that these questions all deserve an unqualified refusal. Evidence for this is both internal and external to the Book of Revelation. External evidence is flagged in the opening phrase of Revelation, heralding disclosures from a person who is already known and defined from other sources (1:1). Internal evidence comes chiefly but not exclusively in the form of the Lamb that has been slaughtered (5:6) and the Son of man who has been pierced (1:7). Casting Revelation as a throwback to pre-Christian expectations, even if this anticipation has been deferred, is therefore an unacceptable basis for its interpretation. Instead, as Richard Bauckham suggests, "when the slaughtered Lamb is seen 'in the midst of' the divine throne in heaven (5:6; cf. 7:17), the meaning is that Christ's sacrificial death *belongs to the way God rules the world*."¹¹ Believers are martyred on the basis of the same logic, and the present translation of one ambiguous verse therefore warrants the exclamation that follows. "He who is to go into captivity will go into captivity; he who is to be killed with the sword will be killed. Here is the perseverance and the faith of the saints" (13:10). These preliminary observations

¹⁰ Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 278.

¹¹ Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation* (NTT; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 64.

should be seen as an encouragement to resist the tendency to take Revelation's language at face value, and this reservation must also include modes of speech that implies vengeance and retribution.

The Role of Personal Evil in the Interpretation of Revelation

The greatest challenge in this study is not to make Revelation say something else than what the general apocalyptic vision of *ius talionis* tends to engender,¹² or to suggest interpretations contrary to what the surface reading of the text seems to demand. It is rather that it has long been a hallmark of modernity to see evil in depersonalised terms. James Stewart's assertion that if "the effect of Newton, Darwin and Freud has been to banish the divine, it has been even more to banish the demonic"¹³ applies with particular force to Revelation because this stance undermines its worldview, stereotypes its characters, compromises its plot, and violates the most salient features of its narrative. Revelation's actors and imagery teem with precisely the mythological characters that an enlightened view of the world finds unfamiliar and objectionable.

Arguments against a demythologised reading of Revelation will primarily be grounded in the nature of the narrative, but this study readily admits to the bias that the dualist worldview of Revelation looks more true to the evidence of the real world than what the champions of demythologisation were prepared to concede. If the narrative of Revelation is allowed to unfold on its own terms, it is the story of the 'mythological' figures, chief among whom are Christ and Satan, which is told. Satan is not merely a

¹² In his landmark essay on the importance of apocalyptic influences on the New Testament, Ernst Käsemann ("The Beginnings of Christian Theology," in *New Testament Questions for Today* [trans. W. J. Montague; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969], 90-105) makes *ius talionis* the telltale sign of the apocalyptic outlook, sending it forth as a certified DNA-probe to spot and uncover the strands of genuine apocalyptic in the New Testament.

¹³ James Stewart, "On A Neglected Emphasis in New Testament Theology," *SJT* 4 (1951), 292.

shadow in the background, a lifeless stage accessory dwarfed by events playing out on the earthly historical stage. Critical readings of Revelation, which have looked almost exclusively to history to get to the message of the book, assume that the primary target behind its cryptic symbols are the evils of the Roman Empire and one or more of its most unattractive emperors.¹⁴ The historical foreground has tended to absorb full attention and to exhaust the meaning of the unveiling promised in Revelation. It is a premise of the present interpretation that this entrenched presupposition has created a distorted perspective. Instead, the non-human characters in the narrative, largely reduced to symbolic irrelevance in most critical interpretations, must be brought into focus at the expense of the historical foreground that has been the preoccupation of the best scholarly works. Besides, what remains of historical foreground must be interpreted in the light of the mythological background, and not as though knowledge of historical realities in the Roman Empire in Asia Minor holds the key to the meaning of the book.

Serving as the spokesperson for Satan may not seem like an enviable task, but it is sweetened by the prospect of restoring to Revelation its native narrative framework. Besides, the assignment is not driven by the unrealistic objective of making Satan look good. While it has been said that John Milton made Satan a more interesting character than God in *Paradise Lost*, Milton's lively portrait was a rare exception.¹⁵ Satan's role in Revelation does not enhance his reputation, but it serves to magnify the very qualities in God that Satan took the lead in denying. It is this part of God's story that returns to its roots

¹⁴ An example of this approach is found in Leonard Thompson's book, *The Book of Revelation: Apocalypse and Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990). Thompson's thorough description and analysis of conditions in the Roman Empire are rewarding for the interpretation of Revelation, but it assigns undeserved primacy to the historical and political dimension. *Apocalypse* is a theme of Revelation, *Empire*, too, but the subject matter of its most insistent probe lies on a deeper level than the human and contemporary situation.

¹⁵ Philip Wayne (Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Faust*, 2 vols. [London: Penguin, 1949], I, 22) assigns the distinction of producing "the world's most convincing portrait of Satan" to Goethe's *Faust* in the introduction to his translation.

in the original narrative of Revelation, and this is the reason to bewail that the Evil One has been banished from the theological landscape as much as his typological predecessor in the figure of Azazel in the ancient Israelite Day of Atonement ritual (Lev 16:7-11), but without the commensurate attribution of his significance.¹⁶ Before Milton, Anselm of Canterbury tried with painstaking precision to account for the rise of the evil will, but his logic was too entangled in abstract constructs to achieve credible elements of life and personality.¹⁷ To the extent that modern scholarship has grappled with the biblical categories of evil, the interest has been mostly historical.¹⁸ Where the emphasis has been theological, the tendency is either monist, removing the idea of an opponent altogether, or reductionist, depriving the putative opponent of personality. Applying Eric Auerbach's contrast between early biblical narratives and Homer to Satan, he has been reduced to a Homeric character, uniformly illuminated and externalised, his character all foreground and no background. If the present interpretation proposes to extend the notion of depth to Satan, the reason need not be a desire to persuade readers that Satan is real or that he is deserving of the courtesy, but that his character, too, has 'background.'¹⁹

¹⁶ This inference assumes the interpretation suggested by C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, Vol I, *The Pentateuch*, trans. James Martin (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, repr. 1981), 404-5.

¹⁷ Anselm of Canterbury, *On the Fall of the Devil* in *The Major Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 193-232.

¹⁸ The most prolific contributor to the subject from a historical point of view has been Jeffrey Burton Russell, writing as a historian. Among his books are *Satan: the Early Christian Tradition* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981); *Lucifer: The Devil in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984); *Mephistopheles: The Devil in the Modern World* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986); *The Devil: Perceptions of Evil from Antiquity to Primitive Christianity* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987); *The Prince of Darkness: Radical Evil And the Power of Good in History* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988). Neil Forsyth (*The Old Enemy* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987]) traces what he believes are the historical roots of Satan and the combat theme in various ancient cultures and religions.

¹⁹ Erich Auerbach (*Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* [trans. Willard R. Trask; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953], 12) makes his point in connection with biblical descriptions of God and human beings. In literary critical terms a character may be *round* or *flat*. According to E. M. Forster (*Aspects of the Novel* [New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1927], 78), "the test of a round character is whether it is capable of surprising in a convincing way."

Given the importance of personal evil to the present approach to Revelation, three models come to mind as rudimentary points of reference against which to view the subject of evil in general and Satan in particular in the book of Revelation. The biblical scholar Elaine Pagels, the political philosopher Hannah Arendt, and the literary genius Franz Kafka have each described aspects of evil that are useful to the present inquiry. Pagels, whose work on the Gnostic gospels preceded her book *The Origin of Satan*, is chosen because her treatment deals most directly with the New Testament material where Satan appears unambiguously in personified terms.²⁰ Her perspective is reductionist, too, but she is more nuanced and wields a finer brush than the sweeping strokes of such leading demythologizers as David Friedrich Strauss²¹ or Rudolf Bultmann.²² Besides, her sympathetic agenda is specifically to dampen the interpersonal and societal conflicts that religion tends to elicit. In order to do this Pagels focuses on the “specifically *social* implications of the figure of Satan.”²³ Arendt’s *Eichmann in Jerusalem*²⁴ and Kafka’s *The Trial*²⁵ have no direct relationship to Satan or to the Book of Revelation, but both offer

²⁰ Elaine Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels* (New York: Random House, 1979); idem., “Christian Apologists and ‘the Fall of the Angels’: An Attack on Roman Imperial Power?” *HTR* 78 (1985), 301-25; idem., *Adam, Eve, and the Serpent* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989); idem., “The Social History of Satan, the ‘Intimate Enemy’: A Preliminary Sketch,” *HTR* 84:2 (1991), 105-28; idem., *The Origin of Satan* (New York: Random House, 1995). Pagels’ tendency to see the suppression of Gnosticism as the victory of authority over ideas has been criticised in an indirect way by Eric Osborn (“Origen: The Twentieth Century Quarrel and Its Recovery,” in *Origeniana Quinta* [ed. Robert J. Daly; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1992], 30). Osborn claims that Gnosticism was defeated by argument, not by authority; the Gnostics “lost because they could not think.”

²¹ To David Friedrich Strauss (*The Life of Jesus* [trans. George Eliot; London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1902], 254) belief in Satan as a personal being is held to be an impossibility to those “who have not quite shut out the lights of the present age.”

²² Rudolf Bultmann (*Kerygma and Myth* [trans. Reginald H. Fuller; New York: Harper & Brothers, 1961], 4), writing one hundred years after Strauss, claims that “we can no longer believe in *spirits, whether good or evil*,” no less condescending in his tone than had been Strauss. Bultmann’s controversial essay initially appeared in *Deutsches Pfarrerblatt* 30 (1942) during the height of World War II.

²³ Pagels, *Origin of Satan*, xviii.

²⁴ Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Penguin Books, 1977; first publ. by Viking Penguin Inc. 1963).

²⁵ Franz Kafka, *The Trial* (trans. Willa and Edwin Muir; New York: Schocken Books, 1968).

perspectives on the nature of evil that may serve as useful analogies to current scholarly thinking on the subject.

According to Pagels, Satan in the New Testament is shown to loom increasingly large in the Synoptic Gospels and more prominent still in the Fourth Gospel. He is "the intimate enemy" because he figures most conspicuously in the social relations between the first followers of Jesus and their Jewish opponents of the same stock. In that sense his role is most intensely felt in relation to people with whom the new believers have most in common. As that relationship deteriorates and moves toward an unbridgeable schism, the demonic overtones become more explicit. In Pagels' version of the gospels Satan is invoked by the believers to give their struggle a cosmic dimension, and it leads them inevitably to characterise their opponents in language that becomes progressively mean-spirited. By casting their opponents' views as the work of demons, the critics are diminished and deprived of their humanity. 'Otherness' itself assumes demonic character, and the social consequences of this reconstruction of the New Testament community is to stigmatise disagreement and make those who do not believe appear as agents of ultimate evil far more than the issues warrant.

Pagels' thesis reflects the widespread agreement among New Testament scholars of how the social realities of the fledgling Christian communities are mirrored in the gospel accounts.²⁶ Her conclusion should not be discounted; it is no doubt a human tendency to invest otherness with the demonic in order to get the upper hand in a conflict. But Pagels' treatment of the New Testament material is nevertheless one-sided in its selection and unsatisfactory in its application.

²⁶ Pagels' thesis depends on the existence of distinct and divergent communities facing opposition and hostility from the majority along the lines envisioned by J. Louis Martyn in his influential book *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968).

As to selection, the crucial temptation story in the Synoptic Gospels has a life of its own that does not conform to the social situation for which Satan is thought to account; indeed, it eludes any immediate social grounding. Its literary and theological function must instead be found in the authors' perception of a unified biblical narrative. Moreover, even if Pagels' selective treatment of the New Testament material is justified because it is meant to highlight the social function of Satan apart from other meanings, it comes up short precisely where it has been most determined to succeed. The role and reality of the demonic in the New Testament does not only have the function of diminishing opponents, as Pagels suggests. It may often be the other way around. Invoking the demonic imposes limits on the evil attributable to human beings and cushions the blow to the perpetrator of evil. Jesus' parable about the weeds in Matthew could have such a function (Matt 13:24-30). In the larger context the enemy who sowed weeds in the field under cover of night represents Satan, carrying out his sinister scheme of subversion and malice in secret. The enemy in question is not found in the human realm, and the weeds will only stand apart from the wheat when each is allowed to mature and ripen.

Even the most scathing statement attributed to Jesus in the heated discussion with his opponents may be taken in the opposite direction from the one chosen by Pagels. "You are from your father the devil, and you choose to do your father's desires," Jesus is reported to have said (John 8:44). Then follows a gratuitous evaluation of the background of the devil that goes considerably beyond the demands of the struggle at hand if the statement was meant only to demonise and demean the opponents. Jesus asserts that Satan "was a murderer from the beginning and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies" (John 8:44). The temptation to see this as excessive and abusive rhetoric requires the kind of interpretative constraints that Pagels brings to the text.

But her view is not the explanation that rises most naturally from the narrative. If, on the other hand, Jesus' statement is predicated on the assumption that his violent execution had emerged as a distinct possibility in the minds of his most hostile critics, as the Johannine narrative has implied at an early stage (John 5:18), the function of the demonic may be seen as a mitigating factor rather than the reverse. It is to him who "was a murderer from the beginning" Jesus traces the threat to his own life. Behind the actions and events playing out on the human stage he perceives a force at work without which their hatred and distortions cannot be explained, and in this sense the human agent is partially absolved. Pagels' interpretation is flawed not only because of a dismissive treatment of key New Testament passages, but also in terms of achieving the aim she seeks, her careful scholarship notwithstanding. The reality of the demonic in the New Testament gives evil a superhuman dimension in which human beings are subject to external factors and not the sole and independent agents in the drama of history. Pagels' use of the New Testament evidence leans so one-sidedly in the direction of a reductive reconstruction that it even compromises the social function of Satan that is so crucial to the message of reconciliation underlying her thesis.

But what is the nature of personal evil in Revelation, once the inadequacy of reductive interpretations has been established? While it is premature to attempt to answer that question in this introduction, it is useful to delineate further what Satan is *not* by way of two further analogies: He is not like *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, nor is he like the main character in Kafka's *The Trial*.

When Hanna Arendt went to Jerusalem to observe the trial of Adolf Eichmann, the German official entrusted with the task of effecting 'the final solution' and the annihilation of world Jewry, she expected to meet a person whose evil traits would be as apparent to the naked eye as the horrific deeds he had perpetrated in the extermination camps across

Europe. Others shared that expectation, and the trial was carefully stage-managed in order to highlight the monstrous character of the defendant. But Arendt was shocked to discover how normal Eichmann seemed to be: a conscientious worker, a devoted parent, a caring husband, a responsible citizen, and a polite, if bland, neighbour. The discrepancy between his personality and his deeds was deeply unsettling because the Eichmann of the Jerusalem trial came across as quite harmless. He seemed to harbour no hatred or evil intentions; indeed, very little character or will of his own. Someone may have hated the Jews, but it was not Adolf Eichmann. His sin was that he had become so subservient to orders that he would have obeyed even if someone in authority had told him to kill his mother. The defendant was important and even indispensable to the execution of the evil deeds, but he was almost irrelevant as to the actual cause of the evil committed. Spectators were baffled at the unravelling of a hollow character, a man adrift whose ethical compass only seemed to respond to the will of others; a person who had no critical capacity of his own, and no ability to distinguish between what is important and unimportant. Ultimately, it was precisely his uncanny expertise in doing unimportant things that translated its unreflected logic into the commission of unimaginable and unprecedented evil. In the end Arendt came to see him as a puzzling, pathetic figure, and the experience led her to coin the spectacle as the *banality of evil*. Its banality should in this context be set in sharp contrast to concepts like intentionality, meaning the absence of the expected premeditated purpose, and its plain, simplistic and everyday nature, manifested in deeds vastly and inexplicably exceeding the deflated personality behind them.

For the present purpose it is beside the point whether Arendt's controversial analysis of Eichmann is correct.²⁷ Here it is sufficient to assert that Satan in the book of Revelation

²⁷ In all likelihood Arendt's portrait is incorrect and inadequate. David Cesarani (*Eichmann: His Life and Crimes* [London: William Heinemann, 2004]) argues plausibly that Arendt's book is biased by a very limited exposure to Eichmann's life and by the flawed explanatory models underlying her account.

cannot be like the Eichmann of her report, and Revelation's portrait of evil does not conform to the notion of banality that she brought back from the trial in Jerusalem. Evil may be a negation in philosophical terms, the absence of good, as Anselm argued with such passion almost a thousand years ago, but the demonic in Revelation cannot be described merely in categories of negations, or its agent as a nobody whose causal role far exceeds the potential of the character on the order of Eichmann as Hanna Arendt saw him.

But Joseph K. in Kafka's novel *The Trial* cannot be the Satan of Revelation any more than Eichmann.²⁸ At the outset of the novel, Joseph K. is placed under arrest under eerie circumstances in the sense that there is no line of demarcation between his ordinary life and his surreal encounter with Jurisprudence. As he is called to appear before the Inspector for the first interview in a room next to his own apartment, his warders caution him to change into more appropriate attire. "'It must be a black coat,' they said."²⁹ This is an early and symbolic give-away, a premonition of the end implicit from the very beginning. As yet there is no charge against this most ordinary and dutiful bank official. Nevertheless, the outcome seems like a foregone conclusion. "But this isn't the capital charge yet," Joseph K. protests, as if to acknowledge the devastating meaning of the symbolism. Refusing the invitation to respond to his objection, the men commissioned to bring Joseph K. to justice dismiss his complaint. "The warders smiled, but stuck to their: 'It must be a black coat.'"³⁰

This detail is really all we need to know. Indeed, the story is of interest in this context only because of the black coat Joseph K. is told to put on from the very beginning, serving as the symbol of the forgone conclusion and the inevitable outcome. In theological

²⁸ It is hard to disagree with the assessment offered by Albert Camus on the cover of Kafka's book. "Here we are taken to the limits of human thought. Indeed, everything in this work is, in the true sense, essential. It states the problem of the absurd in its entirety."

²⁹ Kafka, *Trial*, 9.

³⁰ Kafka, *Trial*, 9.

terms this translates into a view of Satan that sees him as a person permanently dressed in a black coat. Black is his rightful colour; Satan has, as it were, never worn anything else. His profile in theological literature generally assumes that any elucidation of his background is as immaterial to the outcome as is the futile effort of Joseph K. to get a hearing before the unseen tribunal. In New Testament theology little is said about him not only because he is a relic of mythology, but also because it is assumed that he is a static fixture who has nothing to say.³¹ To make the point more explicit as it will be explored in Revelation, such a view of Satan is a caricature, more so because the author of Revelation was well aware that the losing protagonist in the cosmic drama had not always been dressed in black.

It will not suffice, then, to use any of the examples outlined above as models for one's understanding of personal evil in the book of Revelation, whether Satan as intensifying metaphor for human conflict, or Satan as the banal and soulless vector for evil, or Satan as a figure whose evil nature is a matter of course and whose story does not require any reflection. The present interpretation will pursue leads that fracture these stereotypes. Such leads were apparent to the authors of the New Testament and to early Christian interpreters. I intend to define and pursue those leads with a measure of determination in this thesis.

For all his stridency, D. F. Strauss did not fail to note the seamless nature of the New Testament narratives with respect to God and the reality of personal evil when he set out to demythologize the New Testament. In a blunt statement, he held that "if Christ has come in order to destroy the work of the devil, then there was no need for him to come since there is no devil; if there is a devil, but only as the personification of the principle of evil, fine; then

³¹ James L. Resseguie (*Revelation Unsealed: A Narrative Critical Approach to John's Apocalypse* [Leiden: Brill, 1998], 22-23), in a narrative critical approach to Revelation, does an exceptional job in laying out the salient narrative elements, but his Satan, too, is reduced to a stock character who has nothing to say. He would have had something to say if Resseguie had allowed more room for Revelation's Old Testament allusions in his interpretation.

it is also sufficient to hold Christ as an impersonal idea.”³² Critical interpreters have found it more palatable to yield ground on the personification of evil than on the divine counterpart, and the one to one relationship between Christ and his adversary pointed out by Strauss has been admitted evasively, if at all. K. L. Schmidt, tracing the biblical basis for the decline and fall of the highest of the angels, agrees that Strauss’ conclusion is proper and fully in line with the nature of Revelation and the rest of the New Testament.³³ And although Pagels has harnessed the references to Satan exclusively in order to shed light on the psychology of conflict, she is quite aware that more was at stake in the mind of the original writer. “Satan, although he seldom appears onstage in these gospel accounts nevertheless plays a central role in the divine drama,” she writes, “for the gospel writers realize that the story they have to tell would make little sense *without* Satan.”³⁴

This assessment certainly applies to Revelation, as well. Its author has a story to tell that makes little sense without Satan, and there is no shortcut for the reader but to adjust to the author’s narrative framework. But the aim here, lest the scope of the present interpretation is eclipsed, is not only an interpretation that retains the New Testament view of evil whatever the cost. It is also an interpretation that does justice to the notion of *apocalypsis* promised at the beginning of Revelation, an unveiling of God’s character that may be credible and clarifying to readers perplexed by evil in our time.

The foregoing means that the road to the *pistis Iesou* passage of necessity will be a long one. Somewhat distinctive parameters for the narrative must be defined before honing in on the meaning of the text, specifically the combat theme in Revelation, the issue at the

³²D. F. Strauss, *Die christliche Glaubenslehre in ihrer geschichtlichen Entwicklung und im Kampfe mit der modernen Wissenschaft* (Wissenschaft Tübingen: C. F. Osiander, 1840-41), II, 15.

³³K. L. Schmidt, “Lucifer als gefallene Engelmacht,” *TZ* 7 (1951), 161.

³⁴Pagels, *Origin of Satan*, 12. H. H. Rowley (*The Importance of Apocalyptic* [London: Lutterworth Press, 1944]), 161) notes that “goodness and evil are personal terms. Abstractions have no independent existence. And goodness and evil are not impersonal entities, floating around somewhere in space. They inhere in persons and only in persons.”

heart of the conflict, and the legitimacy of reading Revelation as theodicy. The project cannot succeed without paying attention to the character of Satan, who, in Revelation's comprehensive field of vision, brought his rebellion against God to earth, and with it the devastating charge that the Creator of the universe is an arbitrary despot who has little thought for the freedom and well-being of his creatures (Gen 3:1). Admitting the risk of etymological inferences, the verbal root of the Greek designation *diabolos* nevertheless fits the picture of this character perfectly: He set out to malign and calumniate the Creator; in fact, the unpretentious word 'mudslinging' has been proposed as a faithful translation of the etymological root in Greek and a true description of the character. Against the charge of arbitrariness there is no quick fix. The mere assertion of sovereignty can even aggravate matters unless such a charge is exposed as groundless.

The term *pistis Iesou* encapsulates the solution to this crisis, and a preview of its meaning may be suggested even at this early stage. The text will not break into the categories of law and gospel according to the traditional soteriological paradigm. In the context of the conflict in Revelation "the patience of the saints ... who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus" (14:12, NKJV) refers to people who have grasped God's way as it came to light in Jesus, and who are thus enabled to stand firm in the conflict. Related passages will be explored in order to bolster the case for this understanding (1:1-2; 12:17; 13:10; 19:10).

Outline of Procedure

The thesis is divided into three parts. The second chapter in Part One will discuss methodological considerations in the interpretation of Revelation. To questions of method belong such issues as genre, language, structure, the unity of the book, the author's use of the Old Testament, and the hermeneutical perspective of Revelation. This perspective will

be explored under the term 'rhetorical situation.' Revelation's worldview should be seen as the echoing chamber for the textual narrative in the form of shared perceptions and common ground that are implicit because the author could not and did not see any need to spell out the worldview he already held in common with his readers. It corresponds loosely to the concept of *fore-understanding*, as it is used in Frank Kermode's assertion that "without some fore-understanding of the whole we can make no sense of the part."³⁵

Part Two, divided into six chapters, traces the story line of Revelation with an eye to reading Revelation as a loosely conceived theodicy. The contour and force inherent in Revelation's narrative is expected to facilitate this task, making careful attention to the story line a critical aspect for interpretation.

In Part Three the subject is *pistis Iesou* and the message of Revelation. The first chapter in this part (ch. 9) makes some preliminary observations as to the force and context of this phrase. Chapter 10 presents and discusses the four main interpretative options for *pistis Iesou* and their relative merits.

The two appendices at the end should also be mentioned. Appendix I looks at evidence that attenuates the application of Revelation 13 to the Roman Empire and the myth of Nero's return. Appendix II reviews the narrative character of Revelation, weighing the theological emphasis and the merits for reading Revelation as a theodicy.

As noted at the beginning of this introduction, the question of means belongs in the forefront of the present reading of Revelation. There can be no doubt that the author of Revelation sees God as the solution to, and not as the cause of, the perplexing reality of evil. To the believing author of this remarkable book a world delivered from evil is possible only where the truth of what God is like is known. In this respect Revelation

³⁵ Kermode, *Genesis of Secrecy*, 5. Elaborating the importance of *fore-understanding* Kermode writes that "even at the level of the sentence we have some ability to understand a statement before we have heard it all, or at any rate to follow it with a decent provisional sense of its outcome; and we can do this only because we bring to our interpretation of the sentence a pre-understanding of its totality" (p. 70).

echoes the conviction of the Old Testament book where the first dawning of apocalyptic is said to originate,³⁶ "They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea" (Isa 11:9).

The Old Testament visionary could only see in faint outline the agent that would bring this about, but what he saw, I suggest, or what Isaiah's many echoes in Revelation hint that he thought his prophetic predecessor had seen, is what the author of Revelation calls *pistis Iesou*.

³⁶ Paul D. Hanson (*The Dawn of Apocalyptic* [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979], 32-34) traces the first trickle of apocalyptic in the Old Testament to the prophet Isaiah.

CHAPTER TWO

THE LITERARY PARAMETERS OF REVELATION

Introduction

The literary parameters that will be addressed in this chapter are genre, language, unity, structure, John's use of the Old Testament, and the rhetorical situation of Revelation. All of these parameters are significant for the present interpretation.

Genre is recognised as a key determinant of interpretation because it alerts the reader to the kind of literature he or she is reading and thus sets the preliminary parameters for understanding.¹ Attention to the language of Revelation is an obligatory aspect of exegesis because the Greek of Revelation deviates from the standard *Koine* of its time and also because Revelation's generous use of the Old Testament raises the question of whether its author mined the Hebrew Old Testament or the Greek for his allusions. Questions concerning the unity of Revelation highlight the swing from scholarship that more or less took the disunity of the book for granted to the current consensus that sees Revelation as a unified and meticulously integrated book. If this shift reflects negatively on the presuppositions of past scholarship, its practical importance for today's reader is to extend the premise of literary unity to the likelihood that the book's unity also is thematic. Closely related to this is the fact that no one can read Revelation without noticing peculiarities of structure, only one of which is the recurring cycles of seven in the visionary sequences. Structural features indicate intention on the part of the author, and decisions regarding structure may therefore influence and facilitate the reader's grasp of his message.

Distinct from which language version of the Old Testament the author had in mind is the question of how his liberal and loose use of the Old Testament provides clues or even

¹ On the importance of genre there is agreement between such different approaches to interpretation as that of E. D. Hirsch (*Validity in Interpretation* [New Haven, Yale University Press, 1967], 74) and Kermode (*Genesis of Secrecy*, 18).

keys to the message he seeks to convey. Recent work on Revelation has seen a groundswell of interest in this aspect of method, approaching the level of a paradigm shift, and it is a premise of the present study that intertextual features of Revelation are indispensable signifiers of meaning.² Finally, a section on the 'rhetorical situation' of Revelation covers the problem that the book is addressing and what it seeks to accomplish, proceeding from the hypothesis that the 'situation' in Revelation is more complex than what has often been assumed.

Genre

With regard to genre the primary and obvious question is whether Revelation's first word ἀποκάλυψις also should be seen as an announcement of genre, setting Revelation apart as predominantly an *apocalyptic* book. The proposed definition that sees an apocalypse as a disclosure presented in a narrative framework through the mediation of an otherworldly being, opening to view a transcendent reality that is both temporal (a new age) and spatial (another world) fits the world of Revelation.³ But this broad definition also delineates the boundaries of the genre in such a way that Revelation is included even though important features, such as lack of pseudonymity, set it apart from other 'apocalyptic' literature.

² Ziva Ben-Porat ("The Poetics of Literary Allusion," *PTL* 1 [January 1976], 127) defines literary allusion as "a device for the simultaneous activation of two independent texts." The same idea is more frequently discussed under the more general and arcane concept of 'intertextuality.'

³ John J. Collins, ed., *Apocalypse: The Morphology of a Genre* (*Semeia* 14; Missoula: Scholars Press 1979), 9. Among ideas considered to be 'apocalyptic' are the notion of imminence, a drastic divine 'in-breaking' into the usual order, cosmic dualism, resurrection, and final judgment. Apocalyptic as a literary genre is itself a disputed subject where generic features of literature overlap with apocalyptic concepts but are not identical with them. Klaus Koch (*The Rediscovery of Apocalyptic* [trans. Margaret Kohl; London: SCM Press, 1972], 94) makes the destruction of Satan the central idea of apocalyptic. Christopher Rowland (*The Open Heaven: A Study of Apocalyptic in Judaism and Early Christianity* [London: SPCK, 1982], 20) finds the mode of revelation to be the distinguishing factor, defining the essential character of apocalyptic as "the disclosure of the divine secrets through direct revelation." E. P. Sanders ("The Genre of Palestinian Jewish Apocalypses," in *Apocalypticism in the Mediterranean World and the Near East* [ed. David Hellholm; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1983], 447-59) points out that traits said to be characteristic of apocalyptic literature also apply to types of literature that are not classified as apocalyptic, that the definition tends to downplay the variability and individual characteristics of each 'apocalyptic' work, and that the generative element behind such literature has not been settled. A number of scholars caution that apocalyptic is resistant to definition, arguing instead to eschew definition in favour of description.

Charles' claim that the qualities of Revelation compared to the non-canonical apocalypses "is not merely relative but absolute" must be seen as a word of caution against interpretations that build on generic similarities alone.⁴ Moreover, the distorting potential of this classification with regard to Revelation is considerable because it tends to overlook characteristics that align the book closely with the genre of prophetic literature as much as with apocalyptic. It is likely that the use of the word *apokalypsis* in the opening verse has led to conclusions that the author "neither intended nor foresaw."⁵ For instance, Morton Smith has shown convincingly that the term *apokalypsis* was not a signifier of literary genre at the time of the writing of Revelation.⁶

The tendency to equate the word *apokalypsis* with the genre of apocalyptic literature or to classify Revelation in this category on other grounds has been challenged most thoroughly by Frederick David Mazzaferri.⁷ He, too, argues that the use of *apokalypsis* as a determinant of genre is irrelevant since this word was not a technical term in John's day.⁸ In his view neither the form nor the absence of pseudonymity supports the case for apocalyptic classification. The eschatology of Revelation is Christian, and its outlook is not deterministic. On the basis of these and other features Mazzaferri concludes, probably a bit one-sidedly, that Revelation does not even qualify as a 'proximate apocalypse' and that the case for classifying it as prophecy is more cogent.⁹ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza sees the

⁴ R. H. Charles, *The Revelation of St. John* (2 vols. ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1920), I, lxxxvii.

⁵ John Wick Bowman, "The Revelation to John: Its Dramatic Structure and Function," *Int* 9 (1955), 437.

⁶ Morton Smith, "On the History of *ΑΠΟΚΑΛΥΠΤΩ* and *ΑΠΟΚΑΛΥΨΙΣ*," in Hellholm, ed., *Apocalypticism*, 9-20.

⁷ Frederick David Mazzaferri, *The Genre of the Book of Revelation from a Source-critical Perspective*, (BZNW 54; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1989). Greg Beale (*The Book of Revelation*, [NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999], 29) also sees Revelation as a prophetic work.

⁸ Cf. Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 3.

⁹ Mazzaferri, *Genre*, 382-83.

opening verses of Revelation in a similar light, arguing that it was the author's intention to write "*a revelatory prophetic letter*,"¹⁰ a descriptive and comprehensive term that leaves Revelation in the prophetic bracket, if not in a category of its own. Bauckham strikes a middle ground, calling Revelation "a work of apocalyptic scripture, the climax of prophetic revelation," but his emphasis on Revelation as a repository of the meaning of Old Testament prophecy puts its relationship to the prophetic body of literature in the Old Testament in the foreground.¹¹

If the genre of Revelation could be summarized in *one* word taken from the book itself, that word would probably be προφητεία and not ἀποκάλυψις (Rev 1:3; 22:7, 10, 18-19).¹² The former term is more frequent, corresponds better to the modern notion of genre on the terms of the composition, and appears more in line with the express purpose of the author. Austin Farrer quite correctly sees the author working under inspiration in order to produce "a new Ezekiel."¹³ Prophetic classification does not deny to Revelation characteristics properly considered to be apocalyptic. However, since determination of genre is meant to facilitate the task of understanding, the ambiguity of Revelation leaves the question of genre partly unresolved. It seems most prudent and most near to the truth to describe rather than classify. A cautious view in this regard jeopardizes advantages that result from clear-cut decisions regarding genre, but it also guards against simplistic and

¹⁰ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Revelation: Vision of a Just World* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 23; italics added.

¹¹ Richard Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1993), xi.

¹² J. N. Sanders ("St John on Patmos," *NTS* 9 [1962-3], 76) considers Revelation "a unique specimen of its kind, hardly 'apocalyptic' in the narrow sense but rather prophecy."

¹³ Austin Farrer, *The Revelation of St. John the Divine* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), 29.

stereotypical readings.¹⁴ On the evidence of the literary and generic complexity of Revelation such caution seems well advised.¹⁵

Language

With regard to the language of Revelation there are at least two sets of issues, distinct, but closely related. The first is whether Revelation was originally written in Hebrew or Aramaic. C. C. Torrey's suggestion that Revelation is a Greek translation from an Aramaic original has remained a minority opinion that has not generated much support.¹⁶ Instead, the main question has revolved around more indirect Semitic influence on Revelation, whether the author was a person of Semitic background who wrote 'translation Greek,' and whether he used a Hebrew or a Greek source for his allusions to the Old Testament. Nearly a century ago the leading scholar favouring a Greek Old Testament source, Henry Barclay Swete, argued that "the Apocalyptist generally availed himself of the Alexandrian version of the Old Testament."¹⁷ Swete believed that even traces of evidence that the author may have used the Hebrew Old Testament could be explained otherwise.¹⁸ More recently, Greg Beale, especially in his earlier work, has expressed a similar view,¹⁹ although his argument in favour of an exclusive Greek Old Testament source has been modified to allow for both Greek and

¹⁴ J. M. Vogelsang ("The Interpretation of Ezekiel in the Book of Revelation," Ph.D. Dissertation, Harvard University, 1985, 300) argues boldly the potential pitfalls of interpretations that proceed on overconfident assumptions with regard to genre. He contends that Revelation is actually an 'anti-apocalypse', the "deliberate transformation of the genre to convey a diametrically different message and meaning than is usually communicated by the genre." On the opposite extreme is Leonard Thompson (*Revelation* [ANTC; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998], 35), asserting that in order to understand Revelation "one eye must be on the large circle of revelatory texts, the other on the specific language and themes of John's book." The ensuing catalogue of apparent parallels to other apocalyptic texts throughout his commentary have little explanatory power, however, revealing the weakness of approaches that build on broad definitions of apocalyptic rather than on descriptions of each individual work.

¹⁵ Jürgen Roloff (*The Revelation of John* [trans. John E. Alsup; CC; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993], 5-7) reserves judgment on the subject of genre along the lines voiced here.

¹⁶ C. C. Torrey, *The Apocalypse of John* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1958), 13-48.

¹⁷ Henry Barclay Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John*, 3d ed. (London: Macmillan & Co., 1908), clv.

¹⁸ Cf. Swete, *Apocalypse*, clvi.

¹⁹ Greg K. Beale, "A Reconsideration of the Text of Daniel in the Apocalypse," *Bib* 67 (1986), 543.

Semitic sources.²⁰ Essays by Stanley E. Porter²¹ and Allen Dwight Callahan²² have revived the case for a composition that can be explained within the exclusive framework of Greek Septuagint idiom. However, the anomalies of the Greek of Revelation make this view unsatisfactory. Callahan's claim that "the seer, with strategy and premeditation, transgressed grammatical norms as an exercise of his own discursive power" is hardly a persuasive reason for the peculiarities of Revelation's language.²³

Dissenting sharply from Swete is R. H. Charles, whose sustained attention to the nuances of John's language has probably not been surpassed.²⁴ Charles is also tempted to believe that "the author of the Apocalypse deliberately set at defiance the grammarian and the ordinary rules of syntax,"²⁵ but his explanation for these aberrations is easier to accept than the one proposed above by Callahan. Charles is unequivocally in favour of a Hebrew source for John's allusions, put to use by a writer who thinks in Hebrew but writes in Greek.²⁶ A. Vanhoye's seminal study of Revelation's use of Ezekiel also comes down on the side of a Hebrew Old Testament source.²⁷ To L. P. Trudinger, the peculiar language of Revelation makes it possible to assert with confidence that "the writer of Revelation is informed primarily by Semitic O.T. sources rather than Greek."²⁸ G. Mussies' detailed study

²⁰ Greg K. Beale, *John's Use of the Old Testament* (JSNTSup 166; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 62.

²¹ Stanley E. Porter, "The Language of the Apocalypse in Recent Discussions," *NTS* 35 (1989), 582-603.

²² Allen Dwight Callahan, "The Language of Apocalypse," *HTR* 4 (1995), 453-70.

²³ Callahan, "Language," 464-5.

²⁴ Callahan ("Language," 454), too, admits as much.

²⁵ Charles, *Revelation* I, cxliii.

²⁶ Charles, *Revelation* I, cxliii.

²⁷ A. Vanhoye, "L'utilisation du livre d'Ézékiel dans l'Apocalypse," *Bib* 43 (1962), 436-76.

²⁸ L. P. Trudinger, "Some Observations Concerning the Text of the Old Testament in the Book of Revelation," *JTS* 16 (1966), 84.

of the language of Revelation holds that the linguistic background of John was Hebrew or Aramaic, seeing this distinction as a moot point that nevertheless tells in favour of the former.²⁹ Steven Thompson claims that the Semitic texture of the Greek of Revelation is so pervasive that the Greek "was little more than a membrane, stretched tightly over a Semitic framework, showing many essential contours from beneath."³⁰ Jan Fekkes' study of the allusions to Isaiah in Revelation affirms a Hebrew source,³¹ whereas Steve Moyise, in a more general work on the use of the Old Testament in Revelation, argues for both Semitic and Greek sources.³² To David Aune the evidence points to an author of Jewish background. This author was thoroughly familiar with the Hebrew text of the Old Testament, and his distinctive Greek style reflects the influence of both Hebrew and Aramaic.³³

Ambiguity with regard to language is further clouded by the question of which recension or recensions John may have used, regardless of whether his Old Testament text was Hebrew or Greek. Trudinger has proposed a Hebrew textual tradition other than the Masoretic text.³⁴ Yarbrow Collins, following D. Barthélemy, suggests that the existence of the Greek *kaige* recension explains the instances where John's Greek deviates from the Septuagint, and that the possible use of this recension undercuts the case for a Hebrew source.³⁵ The likelihood that various recensions were in existence is substantial, but the

²⁹ G. Mussies, *The Morphology of Koine Greek As Used in the Apocalypse of St. John* (Leiden: Brill, 1971); *idem*, "The Greek of the Book of Revelation," in *L'Apocalypse johannique et l'Apocalyptique dans le Nouveau Testament* (ed. J. Lambrecht; Paris-Gembloux: Éditions Duculot, 1980), 167-77.

³⁰ Steven Thompson, *The Apocalypse and Semitic Syntax* (SNTSMS 52; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 108.

³¹ J. Fekkes, *Isaiah and Prophetic Tradition in the Book of Revelation: Visionary Antecedents and Their Development* (JSNTSup 93; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994), 15-17.

³² Steve Moyise, *The Old Testament in the Book of Revelation* (JSNTSup 115; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 113.

³³ David Aune, *Revelation 1-5* (WBC 52; Dallas: Word Books, 1997), cxxi.

³⁴ Trudinger, "Text," 88.

³⁵ Yarbrow Collins, *Crisis & Catharsis*, 48.

validity of Yarbro Collins' claim and the practical consequences of this possibility remain largely conjectural.

The issue of language is important in a general way because it sheds light on the background of the author and the character of his thought. But the underlying Old Testament source makes a difference that is still more crucial in terms of our ability to identify and understand allusions to the Old Testament in Revelation. If John translated from the Hebrew when alluding to an Old Testament text, as seems likely, identical wording with the Greek text of the Old Testament is not to be expected. The modern reader must be aware of this possibility and pay attention to the Hebrew text and to textual variants of the potential Hebrew source when assessing the merits of proposed allusions to the Old Testament. The author's quest for literalness and verbal precision, as noted in Trudinger's study, must also be kept in mind.

The Unity of Revelation

Scholarly consensus regarding the unity of Revelation has come a long way since the radical hypotheses of source critics during the nineteenth century. For instance, in 1882 the German scholar Daniel Völter argued that the main body of Revelation was composed of a *Grundschrift* consisting of nine distinct sections that he attributed to John Mark and of a secondary source consisting of eight sections composed by Cerinthus.³⁶ Völter claimed to find evidence for the handiwork of a first redactor working during the reign of Trajan, and again of a second redactor during the reign of Hadrian. The pretense of precision for such an elaborate scenario seems staggering by contemporary standards. Völter saw Revelation 14:6-7 as the work of John Mark. Revelation 14:9-12, part of which constitutes the point of departure for the present study (14:12), was attributed to a redactor who worked during the

³⁶ Völter's work was appropriately entitled *Die Entstehung der Apokalypse* (Freiburg, 1882); my source for his work is Wilhelm Bousset, *Die Offenbarung Johannis* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1906), 109-10.

reign of Trajan, and a second redactor added verse 13 during the reign of Hadrian.³⁷ The plausibility of this reconstruction was grounded in a contemporary historical (*zeitgeschichtlich*) view of Revelation's composition and interpretation, each section reflecting events assumed to correspond to the textual fragment in question.

In 1895 Herman Gunkel published a strongly worded critique of the contemporary historical view under the revealing title *Schöpfung und Chaos in Urzeit und Endzeit*.³⁸ Gunkel also saw a layered text, but he argued that the layers should be teased apart and demarcated in the light of *traditionsgeschichtlich* research, mapping out the history of religion underlying its composition. Concentrating on the combat theme in Revelation 12, Gunkel believed it mandatory to trace the story back to its ancient Babylonian source, acknowledging adaptations and additions brought to bear on the original myth by various peoples and cultures through the ages. Only when this work had been done with the appropriate scientific rigour, would it be proper to subject it to other types of literary analysis. In his eyes the contemporary historical view of Revelation was bankrupt, allowing for a few exceptions in Revelation 13 and 17.³⁹

Wilhelm Bousset's commentary on Revelation published in 1906 brought back the contemporary historical understanding of Revelation as decisively as Gunkel had tried to bury it.⁴⁰ But Bousset's work also marks a turning point in terms of acknowledging Revelation as a unified composition. Charles subsequently took the case for a unitary

³⁷ Cf. Bousset, *Offenbarung*, 110.

³⁸ Hermann Gunkel, *Schöpfung und Chaos in Urzeit und Endzeit: eine religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung über Gen 1 und Ap Joh 12* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1895).

³⁹ Gunkel, *Schöpfung und Chaos*, 233. Gunkel's rhetoric is noteworthy, such as his disbelief at the naïveté of anyone seeing the story of the male child in Rev 12 as an allegory of Jesus (pp. 174-80).

⁴⁰ According to Bousset (*Offenbarung*, 129), "wir nehmen keine Grundschrift mit allmählichen Erweiterungen, keine Quellen und keinen mechanisch arbeitenden Redaktor an, sondern einen apokalyptischen Schriftsteller, der jedoch in vielen Punkten nicht aus freier Hand schuf, sondern ältere apokalyptische Fragmente unter Überlieferungen, deren Überlieferung vorläufig noch dunkel bleibt, verarbeitete." In other respects Bousset's work belongs in the history of religion tradition.

composition still further, making an exception for Revelation 20 that bears materially on the present thesis.⁴¹

Claims for disparate sources and compositional disunity persist, but they have been greatly modified compared to the bold and largely unsubstantiated assertions made during the heyday of historical critical scholarship. Indeed, significant modifications of previous proposals continue apace. J. Massyngherde Ford suggests in her *Anchor Bible Commentary* that Revelation was a composite from several sources, attributing Revelation 4:1-11:19 to John the Baptist and Revelation 12:1-19:21 to a disciple to John the Baptist.⁴² Lately, however, as David Aune confides in his commentary on the basis of a letter from Ford, she has completely discarded this assessment and now regards the book as a unity.⁴³ The case for separate sources is in Aune's version scaled back to a hypothetical first and second edition, but even this vestige of source criticism lacks persuasive power, especially the claim that the hypothetical first edition "may well have been anonymous, perhaps even pseudonymous."⁴⁴

The unity of Revelation that was long denied is now taken for granted by most scholars even though it must be emphasised that the assumption of unity represents a major shift in scholarly opinion concerning the origin and composition of the book. Bauckham has taken stock of discarded critical opinion in unvarnished terms, stating that "the source-critics of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, who divided Revelation into a number of disparate sources incompetently combined by an editor, could do so only by crass failure to

⁴¹ Charles, *Revelation*, II, 147.

⁴² J. Massyngherde Ford, *Revelation: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 38; New York: Doubleday, 1975), 30-37.

⁴³ Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, cxi.

⁴⁴ Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, cxx. The putative 'First Edition' is suggested to comprise Rev 1:7-12 and 4:1-22:5, the rest being the 'Second Edition.'

appreciate the specific literary integrity of the work as it stands.”⁴⁵ In striking contrast to this, he suggests that “the more Revelation is studied in detail, the more clear it becomes that it is not simply a literary unit, but actually one of the most unified works in the New Testament.”⁴⁶ Schüssler Fiorenza has reached the same conclusion. In her view, “the unitary structure of Rev. does not result from a final redactor’s arbitrary compilation but from the author’s theological conception and literary composition.”⁴⁷

One important consequence of this view is readily apparent. Acceptance of Revelation as a unified work means that the composition retains control over interpretation, not the interpreter over the composition. Instances where the text confronts the interpreter with difficulties cannot be resolved simply by positing another source for the troubling passage, a different author, or a redactor, as Charles does for Revelation 20,⁴⁸ and as has been done for other portions of Revelation in the past. Where such difficulties arise, the argument should not be raised against the text but against the interpretation. Moreover, the evidence for a unified composition justifies the expectation of *thematic* unity as the primary assumption guiding interpretation. While this view can be no more than an assumption that may have to yield if there is compelling evidence against thematic unity, it nevertheless prioritises the options on hand. Clues to the interpretation of an obscure passage or section may be sought in sections that seem clearer, and priority should be given to the interpretation that favours thematic unity. This approach may prove particularly useful with regard to the

⁴⁵ Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, x. In a case study of interpolation theories and redactional insertions in Revelation, taking Rev 19:10 as his example, Bruce Longenecker (“Revelation 19:10: One Verse in Search of an Author,” *ZNW* 91 (2000), 230-37) gives glimpses of the mindset that led scholars to dissect and atomize the text of Revelation. As to Rev 19:10, he finds the evidence to go against the interpolation hypothesis on all counts.

⁴⁶ Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 1.

⁴⁷ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Revelation*, 159.

⁴⁸ Charles, *Revelation*, II, 147.

relationship between chapters 4-11 and 12-22 in Revelation, and it has influenced the decision in the present study to trace the story line of Revelation from the end.

Structure

The unity of Revelation is reflected in its structure even though it must be acknowledged that attempts to elucidate the structure have yielded disparate results. Yarbro Collins finds "almost as many outlines as there are interpreters,"⁴⁹ an indication that it is unrealistic to propose a structural paradigm that will absorb all the nuances of the author's composition. Nevertheless, general observations that apply across the wide array of proposed outlines are possible. One impression designed to impress humility on any interpreter is Bauckham's verdict that "Revelation has been composed with such meticulous attention to detail of language and structure that scarcely a word can have been chosen without deliberate reflection on its relationship to the work as an integrated, interconnected whole."⁵⁰

Despite the great differences of detail among the various outlines, there seems to exist a general "double consensus" among New Testament exegetes on at least two specific features. As observed by Jan Lambrecht, most interpreters acknowledge that Revelation has a prologue (1:1-8) and an epilogue (22:6-21),⁵¹ and that its main division otherwise lies between the messages to the seven churches and the visionary ascent to the heavenly throne room that begins in chapter four.⁵² It is also widely agreed that an epistolary beginning and ending frames Revelation. Real difficulties begin with the main body of the text, spanning

⁴⁹ Adela Yarbro Collins, *The Combat Myth in the Book of Revelation* (Missoula, MT: Scholars, 1976; repr. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2001), 8.

⁵⁰ Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, x.

⁵¹ As there is no rule without an exception, there is no agreement or consensus with regard to any portion of Revelation without significant exceptions. This includes the epilogue, concerning which C. H. Giblin ("Structural and Thematic Correlations in the Theology of Revelation 16-22," *Bib* 55 [1974], 487-504) argues that Rev 22:6ff. should not be compartmentalized from the preceding guided tour of the bowl angel.

⁵² Jan Lambrecht, "A Structuration of Revelation 4,1-22,5," in *L'Apocalypse johannique*, ed. J. Lambrecht, 77.

chapters 4:1 to 22:5. Within this section, elements that are seen as significant structural building blocks are the recurring cycles of seven, the central role of chapter twelve, and the techniques of 'interlocking' and 'intercalation'. Looking at the composition as a whole, a persuasive argument has been advanced for "liturgical dialogue" in the text of Revelation,⁵³ and for the importance of certain formulaic phrases that are significant for interpretation.⁵⁴ Many of these elements are quite readily appreciated in the text and command broad support among Revelation scholars.

The Cycles of Seven

Attempts have been made to divide all of Revelation into cycles of seven, but this proposition invariably runs into the difficulty that no more than four such cycles are explicit in the text.⁵⁵ The four unambiguous cycles are the letters to the seven churches (2:1-3:22), the seven seals (6:1-8:1),⁵⁶ the seven trumpets (8:2-11:19), and the seven bowls (15:1-16:21). The reach of the last cycle extends into the rest of the book because "one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls," explains the demise of the harlot Babylon (17:1-18) and the meaning of the New Jerusalem (21:9-22:5).

⁵³ Ugo Vanni, "Liturgical Dialogue as a Literary Form in the Book of Revelation," *NTS* 37 (1991), 348-72.

⁵⁴ An example is the commission to John to write down ἃ εἶδες καὶ ἃ εἰσὶν καὶ ἃ μέλλει γενέσθαι μετὰ ταῦτα as this phrase has been explored by W. C. van Unnik, "A Formula Describing Prophecy," *NTS* 9 (1962-63), 86-94.

⁵⁵ Bowman ("Revelation," 436-53) has proposed an attractive division into seven acts, each act breaking symmetrically into seven scenes, but his outline must contend with the evidence that only four cycles of seven are explicit. Yarbro Collins (*Combat Myth*, 19) divides the book into two main sections (1:9-11:19 and 12:1-22:5). The two main divisions are clearly backed by the evidence of the text, but when each division is said to have three cycles each, problems arise. For the first section these cycles of seven are (1) the seven messages (1:9-3:22), (2) the seven seals (4:1-8:5), and (3) the seven trumpets (8:2-11:19). For the second section she suggests (1) seven unnumbered visions (12:1-15:4), (2) the seven bowls (15:1-16:20), and (3) yet another series of seven unnumbered visions (19:11-21:8). The two series of seven unnumbered visions seem forced in order to achieve this symmetry.

⁵⁶ It may be argued that the cycle of the scroll sealed with seven seals begins at chapter 5:1, or that it should also include the inaugural scene in chapter 4.

The striking similarity between the trumpet cycle (8:2-11:9) and the bowl cycle (15:1-16:21) has had at least a twofold impact on interpretation. The first is that otherwise apparent disparity between chapters 4:1-11:19 and 12:1-22:5 is greatly attenuated by the resemblance in content and sequence between the trumpets and the bowls, arguing for unity of composition and theme on literary and structural grounds. A second consequence is that a relationship that reads like repetition suggests recapitulation. 'Recapitulation' is a tenuous concept that has meant different things to various interpreters, but the key issue is whether the author of Revelation tells the same story over and over from various angles and perspectives, or whether the cycles of seven should be laid out in a linear fashion, one after the other. Günther Bornkamm's revival of the 'recapitulation theory'⁵⁷ has been critiqued and modified in various ways, but his argument for recapitulation on the basis of the close and likely intended parallel between the trumpets and the bowls is not easily dismissed. This connection, along with the similarity between Revelation 14:14-20 and 19:11-21, constitutes the backbone in Bornkamm's case. His application of the concept appears inconsistent, especially the exclusion of the seven seals in the pattern of recapitulation, but this need not detract from the viability of the concept as such.⁵⁸ In fact, Yarbrow Collins faults his attempt at defining the structure of Revelation on the ground that the recapitulation in the book "is far more extensive than Bornkamm's theory shows."⁵⁹

A number of interpreters who do not deny repetition are nevertheless reluctant to embrace recapitulation. M.-E. Boismard takes the repetitions in Revelation as evidence for the existence of two separate texts, written by the same author at different times and

⁵⁷ Günther Bornkamm, "Die Komposition der apokalyptischen Visionen in der Offenbarung Johannis," *ZNW* 36 (1937), 132-49.

⁵⁸ Bornkamm's claim ("Komposition," 146) that "die Siegelvisionen, die die Öffnung des Buches begleiten, lassen in einer ungeheuren Verkürzung den ganzen inhalt des Buches in rätselhaften Umrissen zum erstenmal erscheinen" may easily be modified into an argument for recapitulation that includes the seven seals as well.

⁵⁹ Yarbrow Collins, *Combat Myth*, 13.

subsequently spliced together into one book.⁶⁰ Rather than viewing the cycles of seven as recapitulations, Ugo Vanni argues that the seventh element in the cycle *encompasses* all that follows.⁶¹ In this scheme each cycle climaxes into the next one, but only the last cycle, the seven bowls, truly brings the end. This pattern of composition has been described as “an upended conical spiral.”⁶² Building on this concept, C. H. Giblin attempts to work out chapters 17-22 as the content of the seventh bowl in 16:17-21.⁶³ Aune suggests that the repetitions in Revelation indicate a recurring plot line, somewhat like the pattern of apostasy and repentance in the book of Judges, rather than recapitulation of the same events from new angles.⁶⁴ These alternatives to recapitulation of some kind are seriously weakened by the impression that each cycle climaxes in a revelatory and cataclysmic end, intensified and magnified with each retelling.⁶⁵ It appears more persuasive to hold that the author’s technique combines recapitulation and progression, and that the repetition also indicates gradation: “The trumpets are worse than the seals, the bowls are worse than the trumpets.”⁶⁶ Schüssler Fiorenza aptly describes the pattern as “a cyclic form of repetition with a continuous forward movement.”⁶⁷ She takes the forward movement to mean that Revelation is “end-oriented rather than cyclic or encyclopedic,”⁶⁸ adding the helpful analogy of “a dramatic motion picture whose individual scenes portray the same person or action each time

⁶⁰ M.-E. Boismard, “L’Apocalypse’, ou ‘les Apocalypses’ de S. Jean,” *RB* 56 (1949), 507-41; see also idem, “Notes sur l’Apocalypse,” *RB* 59 (1952), 161-81.

⁶¹ Ugo Vanni, *La struttura letteraria dell’Apocalisse* (Rome: Herder, 1971).

⁶² Giblin, “Revelation 16-22,” 487.

⁶³ Giblin, “Revelation 16-22,” 487-504.

⁶⁴ Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, xcii-xciii.

⁶⁵ Without denying some merit to Aune’s view (*Revelation 1-5*, xciii), it is surely exaggerated to assert that “no form of the recapitulation theory is valid for the present text of Revelation.”

⁶⁶ Lambrecht, “Structuration,” 103.

⁶⁷ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Vision*, 33.

⁶⁸ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Vision*, 33.

from a different angle or perspective, while simultaneously adding some new insight to the whole."⁶⁹

The formal purpose of the repetitive cycles of seven in Revelation appears to be recapitulation as qualified above.⁷⁰ But even if this be granted, a further note should be made about its meaning. Does recapitulation first and foremost describe a series of events in a chronological sense? Is the *end* of Revelation, and the end-orientation alleged by Schüssler Fiorenza, primarily or exclusively a point in *time*? In her early work on the structure of Revelation, the end is not seen as the climax of a progressive temporal sequence, but as "supernatural, cosmic occurrences" detached from any recognizable historical reference.⁷¹ Her proposed structure includes recapitulation – the trumpets are parallel to the bowls with increasing effects in the latter sequence – but the author "knows only a 'short time' before the eschaton."⁷² The time element thus remains at the centre, whether the cycles are understood as a comprehensive portrayal of history or with an end-orientation in the sense that time is short.

I suggest that the concept of recapitulation needs another dimension in order to be faithful to the pattern in Revelation. The end sought by the repeated and suspenseful cycles of seven is not only to bring a historical process to a definitive conclusion in a temporal sense, to trace a sequence of events to completion, or to bring the eschatological Day of Yahweh to bear on a rebellious world. Revelation envisions a progression toward an end, but the tenor of the disclosure is not only temporal or topical. If the *telos* of the subject matter that is revealed includes a concrete and literal end in historical time, it also speaks to a *divine*

⁶⁹ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Vision*, 36.

⁷⁰ Beale's summary (*Revelation*, 121-51) of the recapitulationist view corresponds roughly to the position taken in the present study.

⁷¹ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, "The Eschatology and Composition of the Apocalypse," *CBQ* 30 (1968), 565.

⁷² Schüssler Fiorenza, "Eschatology and Composition," 563.

purpose for the believer. The interpolation of the sealing between the opening of the sixth and the seventh seals (7:1-17) and the commission to eat the scroll (10:8-11) and to measure the temple and those who worship there (11:1-2) between the sixth and the seventh trumpet are markers of this purpose, designed to sharpen perceptions and solidify the commitment of believers in a world in which there is more than one version of what God is like. Revelation aspires toward a deepening of the horizon of faith, the ability to sift the true from the false, promoting a 'Johannine perspective' couched in apocalyptic terminology.

The aim that is slowly and painstakingly attained by the revelatory scenes, recapitulated at least three times, must also include discernment on the part of the believer. This is not to be understood as insight in a theoretical, philosophical sense, somewhat on the order of a 'philosophy of history' that has been suggested by some interpreters.⁷³ What is at stake in Revelation, suggested as much by the embattled atmosphere in the book as by the historical setting, is faith itself, working itself out in appropriate action (14:12). Knowledge, understanding, and insight are other words that might describe this goal, but the preferred term should probably be discernment. "The Greek word for revelation, *apocalypsis*, has the metaphorical sense of uncovering or taking a lid off, and similarly the word for truth, *aletheia*, begins with a negative particle which suggests that truth was originally thought of as also a kind of unveiling, a removal of the curtains of forgetfulness in the mind," writes Northrop Frye.⁷⁴ Disclosure by the giver aims at discernment on the part of the receiver. Restating the proposition by way of contrasts, Revelation's cycles of seven pursue the aim of illumination as much as the goal of information, for which Christopher Rowland's emphasis on "the disclosure of the divine secrets through direct revelation" is at least a partial

⁷³ Schüssler Fiorenza, "Eschatology and Composition," 549; Heinrich Schlier, *Die Zeit der Kirche* (Freiburg: Herder, 1956), 265-74; Johannes Behm, *Gott und die Geschichte: Das Geschichtsbild der Offenbarung* (Gütersloh, 1925), 23.

⁷⁴ Northrop Frye, *The Great Code* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1983 [1981]), 135.

analogy.⁷⁵ Causes and connections in the tangled web of evil that have previously not been recognised are laid bare, as is the story of what God has done in order to set right what has gone wrong. The reader of Revelation, illumined by the disclosures and stirred by the example of the innumerable respondents within the narrative itself (4:8-11; 5:8-14; 11:16-18; 15:2-4; 19:1-8), is given an opportunity to react with admiration for, and worship of, the Being who exposes what lies behind the calamities that are reported and under whose all-seeing watch these events take place.

The Central Role of Revelation 12

A second issue regarding structure within the main body of the text of Revelation (4:1-22:5) relates to chapter 12. The central role of this chapter for the structure and interpretation of the book as a whole is widely accepted.⁷⁶ Failure to give this chapter its due is easily spotted because the chapter refuses to blend into the repetitive patterns that are otherwise discernible.⁷⁷ Gollinger asserts that "on strictly formal grounds Rev 12 – together with ch. 11 – occupies the central position in the Apocalypse" apart from the merits of this chapter on the basis of its content.⁷⁸ Bauckham takes note of the same feature, observing that "the beginning of chapter 12 seems an uncharacteristically abrupt fresh start, devoid of any

⁷⁵ Rowland, *Open Heaven*, 20.

⁷⁶ The significance of Revelation 12 is supported by the position assigned to this chapter in various outlines and by the number of studies devoted to it. Such studies are Gunkel, *Schöpfung und Chaos*, 172- 398; Pierre Prigent, *Apocalypse 12: Histoire de l'exégèse* (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1959); Hildegard Gollinger, "Das 'grosse Zeichen': Offb. 12 – das Zentrale Kapitel der Offenbarung des Johannes," *BK* 39 (1967) 401-16; idem, *Das "grosse Zeichen";* and Yarbrow Collins, *Combat Myth*, 101-42; Peter Antonysamy Abir, *The Cosmic Conflict of the Church: An Exegetico-Theological Study of Revelation 12,7-12* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1995), 58; Jürgen H. Kalms, *Der Sturz des Gottesfeindes: traditionsgeschichtliche Studien zu Apokalypse 12* (WMANT; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2001), 17-18.

⁷⁷ Neither Lambrecht's designation of chapters 12-14 (cf. "Structuration," 86) as an intercalation nor the inconspicuous role assigned to chapter 12 by Aune (*Revelation 1-5*, c-cv) gives the appropriate weight to this section within Revelation's narrative.

⁷⁸ Gollinger, *Das "grosse Zeichen,"* 119.

literary links with anything that precedes.”⁷⁹ To Fekkes, “the interpretation of Revelation 12 has always been seen as one of the key issues in the understanding of the book as a whole.”⁸⁰

As already noted, the author of Revelation pays attention to detail, weighing his words with utmost precision and care. Chapter 12 is not an exception from this impression. Bauckham’s explanation for the observed ‘ill fit’ of chapter 12 is therefore simply that the author intended it that way; John “made it abrupt precisely in order to create the impression of a fresh start.”⁸¹ The appearance of interruption supports the case for a second division in the body of Revelation 4:1-22:5, beginning at 12:1.⁸² In fact, the initial vision of the heavenly throne room in chapter 4 and the heavenly setting and the focus on heavenly events in chapter 12 indicate that the messages are sent on the same wavelength. They literally originate from the identical point of view, and they provide a perspective on the earthly situation as earthly events are seen from heaven. To the extent that chapter 12 is seen as a “fresh start,” it must be remembered that the new beginning affirms the viewpoint that was adopted with the visionary ascent to the heavenly throne room (4:1), maintaining the spotlight on the otherworldly setting.

Nevertheless, questions regarding the position and function of chapter 12 in Revelation’s overall structure remain, and one of which relates to what precedes this chapter (4:1-11:19). Its relationship to what follows it is readily appreciated and acknowledged, forging a thematic unity that comprises chapters 12-22. It is therefore important to explore the links between chapter 12 and the preceding section of Revelation. In the current interpretation this applies especially to the scene of heavenly combat in Revelation 12:7-9.

⁷⁹ Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 15.

⁸⁰ Fekkes, *Isaiah in Revelation*, 177.

⁸¹ Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 15.

⁸² In addition to the repetitive pattern of seven, Bornkamm (“Komposition,” 133-37) sees two main cycles, 4-11 and 12-22, the former giving a general outline of what is described in greater detail in the latter cycle; cf. Yarbrow Collins, *Combat Myth*, 43.

Since the protagonists in this combat scene are central to the narrative in Revelation 12-20, a similar role might be expected in the narrative leading up to chapter 12. Such a thread has only been sought sporadically in existing interpretations even though Revelation's narrative, on the basis of its layout alone, advises this linkage. Revelation 12 may therefore exert a reflex or retroactive influence on the preceding narrative, highlighting the setting in the heavenly throne room that serves as the location for all the disclosures. Drawing on the central role already allotted to this chapter by many interpreters, it is possible that the combat theme in Revelation 12 provides the perspective from which the rest of the book should be seen, like the hub of a wheel whose spokes radiate in all directions. The consequence of such a model for the understanding of Revelation is most striking with regard to the role of personal evil in the unified narrative, clear and explicit in chapters 12-20 but apparently less so in the cycles of the seals and the trumpets.

Intercalation and Interlocking in Revelation

Interpreters have noted links scattered throughout Revelation that create transitions and connections that facilitate interpretation. Yarbro Collins refers to this as the "technique of interlocking," seen as a continuation of the passage in question and a preview of what follows.⁸³ An example is found in the epistolary introduction in Rev 1:4-6, where the initial greeting reads like a preview of the message to the seven churches (2:1-3:22).⁸⁴ A second proposed example believed to be important is the connection between the seals and the trumpets.⁸⁵ Here a connection is seen between the cry of the martyred saints under the altar at the opening of the fifth seal (6:9-10) and the commissioning of the angels with the seven

⁸³ Yarbro Collins, *Combat Myth*, 16.

⁸⁴ 'Interlocking' is also referred to as 'chain-linking,' cf. Bruce Longenecker, "'Linked like a chain': Rev 22,6-9 in light of an ancient transition technique," NTS 47 (2001), 105-17.

⁸⁵ Cf. Yarbro Collins, *Combat Myth*, 17; Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 8-9.

trumpets (8:2-4), the trumpets coming as an answer to the prayers of then martyred saints.⁸⁶

It has also been suggested that the silence in heaven that comes at the opening of the seventh seal (8:1) interlocks the ensuing sequence of the seven trumpets with the preceding seven seals.⁸⁷ A third possible example of interlocking is even more ambitious. At the blowing of the seventh trumpet the twenty-four elders express their gratitude to God, explaining that “the nations raged, but your wrath has come, and the time for judging the dead, for rewarding your servants, the prophets and saints and all who fear your name, both small and great, and for destroying those who destroy the earth” (11:18). But this ending of the trumpet sequence that concludes the ‘first half’ of the book could be seen as a summary of the events about to unfold in the entire ‘second half’ (12-20). In this way John’s interlocking technique contributes to the unity of the book and suggests options for interpretation.

If ‘interlocking’ is perceived as a literary device that creates connections between the cycles in Revelation, ‘intercalation’ has the opposite effect. The intercalations read like interruptions, puzzling breaks in the narrative order that slows the flow of the narrative, making it easy for the reader to lose one’s bearing in the complex terrain. Once this nuisance is overcome, however, it will be seen that the intercalation actually enhances the story that it ‘interrupts.’ While the narrative appears to be slowed or diverted, the distracting insertion increases the suspense and the sense of destiny implied in the final forward surge of the interrupted narrative. This impression is corroborated by the fact that the two most indisputable intercalations occur at the same point in the sequence, the first between the sixth and the seventh seal (7:1-17), and the second between the sixth and the seventh trumpet (10:1-11:14). The narrative pauses before it takes the last plunge, and that pause comes just before the end.

⁸⁶ Collins, *Combat Myth*, 17.

⁸⁷ Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 9.

But the intercalations are more than a literary device that is strictly subservient to the rest of the narrative. As much as anything else in Revelation, they establish that nothing is said without a definite purpose in mind, making the apparent interruption more than a message in small print that carries less weight than the narrative surrounding it. Between the sixth and the seventh seal attention is shifted from the world to the believing community, focusing on their predicament, needs, and obligations. The final move, we are told, must not take place “until we have marked the servants of our God with a seal on their foreheads” (7:3). Likewise, between the sixth and the seventh trumpet, the interest shifts again from the world to the believing community. A mighty angel descends from heaven on an exalted⁸⁸ and solemn mission, bringing with him βιβλαρίδιον ἡνεωγμένον, “an opened book” (10:2).⁸⁹ Leaving aside the identity of this book, the crucial point comes as the angel who has the book instructs John, “Take and eat it” (10:9). The emphasis on discernment that was suggested previously seems to be reinforced in the sealing of God’s servants and the eating of the opened book. “These interludes,” writes Robert Mounce, “are not so much pauses in the actual sequence of events as they are literary devices by which the church is instructed concerning its role and destiny during the final period of world history.”⁹⁰

Liturgical Dialogue

Ugo Vanni’s proposed category of ‘liturgical dialogue’ for the beginning and ending of the book brings increased clarity to the reading of Revelation.⁹¹ His scheme is persuasive in that

⁸⁸ The exalted status of this figure is born out by his appearance, τὸ πρόσωπον αὐτοῦ ὡς ὁ ἥλιος καὶ οἱ πόδες αὐτοῦ ὡς στῦλοι πυρός (10:1). This compares to the description of Jesus given in the first chapter, ἡ ὄψις αὐτοῦ ὡς ὁ ἥλιος φαίνει ἐν τῇ δυνάμει αὐτοῦ (1:16) and οἱ πόδες αὐτοῦ ὅμοιοι χαλκολιβάνῳ ὡς ἐν καμίνῳ πεπυρωμένης (1:15).

⁸⁹ The contention that this is the previously sealed βιβλίον described in 5:1 is weakened by the anarthrous designation of the book in 10:2 and the diminutive βιβλαρίδιον. The article would be expected if John wished to convey that these books are identical.

⁹⁰ Robert Mounce, *The Book of Revelation* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 205.

⁹¹ Vanni, “Liturgical Dialogue,” 348-72.

it invites a tidier reading of baffling changes in person and perspective in the text. Simply by sorting out who says what, coherence and flow are restored to sections that otherwise seem puzzling, if not erratic. In the prologue Vanni identifies an extended dialogue between the lector who reads the text aloud in the congregation and the response envisioned on the part of the hearers at appropriate points in the text. The interactive nature of the exchange is appreciated by the shift in person.⁹²

Drawing on the work of M. A. Kavanagh, Vanni suggests a similar approach to the epilogue in Rev 22:6-21.⁹³ In the epilogue the proposed speakers are more numerous, alternating between John, an angel, Jesus, and the hearers, but the clarifying potential of this construction may be even greater. In addition, at various points in the main body of the narrative where the pressure seems particularly intense, the reading is interrupted by language cast as dialogue. According to Vanni, such elements are found in Rev 13:9-10, 13:18, and 14:12, the text that constitutes the focal point of this thesis.⁹⁴ The dialogical, exhortative quality of direct address is evident.

ᾯδὲ ἐστὶν ἡ ὑπομονὴ καὶ ἡ πίστις τῶν ἁγίων (13:10).

ᾯδε ἡ ὑπομονὴ τῶν ἁγίων ἐστίν,
οἱ τηροῦντες τὰς ἐντολὰς τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὴν πίστιν Ἰησοῦ (14:12).

Lucidity and clarity are enhanced by Vanni's proposal. It adds a topographical dimension to the text, defining hills and valleys more distinctly in the complex narrative landscape. The dialogical elements stand out as moments of particular emphasis demanding special attention and commitment. In the liturgical setting the dialogue facilitates appropriation, bringing the hearers into direct contact with the one "who is and who was and

⁹² Vanni, "Liturgical Dialogue," 351.

⁹³ Cf. M. A. Kavanagh, *Apocalypse 22:6-21 as Concluding Liturgical Dialogue* (Roma: Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 1984); Vanni, "Liturgical Dialogue," 356-64.

⁹⁴ Vanni, "Liturgical Dialogue," 365-66.

who is to come" (1:4). This adds immediacy and intimacy to the reading. The greeting of "grace and peace" (1:4) from the divine sender and the grateful response directed toward "him who loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood" (1:5) confirm, as an element etched into the structure of Revelation, that the survival, integrity, and well being of the Christian community is the utmost concern of the book. These elements of liturgical dialogue corroborate Schüssler Fiorenza's contention that "the Christian community is the goal of his intention and that all apocalyptic statements are directed and ordered to it."⁹⁵

The Priority of the Genuine

This conceptual preparation also highlights the importance of identifying the genuine before attempting to define the false in the interpretation of Revelation. In the combat that is at the centre of the narrative, we should not be deceived by the impression that the contestants are dressed in sharply contrasting colours so as to be easily distinguished. One manifestation of the false side is so subtle and alluring the whole world follows its lead (13:3). Throughout, what is described as polar opposites should rather be seen as figurations juxtaposing the true and the false, and the striking characteristic of the false is not its obvious and shocking marks of evil, but its resemblance to the good. Each symbol and manifestation of good has its corresponding symbol and incarnation of evil, and the latter should be seen as a counterfeit of the true and not as a completely different entity whose evil is apparent to all. Thus, the one seated on the throne (4:2), the Lamb (6:6), and the Spirit (1:4) all have their counterparts in the dragon (12:3), the beast rising out of the sea (13:1), and the beast rising from the land (13:11). Indeed, the Trinitarian consciousness that seems more developed in Revelation than in any other New Testament book⁹⁶ confronts the counterfeit trinity in form of bewitching

⁹⁵ Schüssler Fiorenza, "Composition," 561.

⁹⁶ Bauckham (*Revelation*, 164) contends that "Revelation has the most developed trinitarian theology in the New Testament, with the possible exception of the Gospel of John, and is all the more valuable for demonstrating the development of trinitarianism quite independently of Hellenistic philosophical categories."

power emanating from “the mouth of the dragon, from the mouth of the beast, and from the mouth of the false prophet” in the end (16:13). “The seal of God” (7:3) has its countermark in “the mark of the beast” (13:16, 17; 14:9), and even though the genuine article is not specifically named in contrast to the mysterious number “666” (13:18), it is assumed by the allusive power of the false number. All this is to say that in Revelation the counterfeit and the false must be defined in relation to the true, not the other way around; that is, the identification of the true must shed light on the nature of the false and take precedence over the historical referential of the false that tends to dominate in critical interpretations. Whether this will yield different results remains to be seen, but it sets up a standard that is more likely to safeguard the contested principle whatever concrete manifestation the false may take.

An Important Phrase

Certain phrases in Revelation have been subjected to special scrutiny in the belief that they offer clues to the interpretation of the rest of the book. One such expression is the charge in Revelation 1:19, γράψον οὖν ἃ εἶδες καὶ ἃ εἰσὶν καὶ ἃ μέλλει γενέσθαι μετὰ ταῦτα. It has been suggested that this phrase is not simply a rough outline of the structure of the book, ἃ εἶδες referring to the vision of Christ in chapter one, ἃ εἰσὶν to the letters to the seven churches in chapters two and three, and ἃ μέλλει γενέσθαι μετὰ ταῦτα to the visions of the future.⁹⁷ The latter part of the expression establishes a clear link to the explanation of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream in the book of Daniel (Dan 2:28, 45), and this linkage is amplified with the repetition of this phrase at the beginning of the visionary sequence in the heavenly throne room (4:1).⁹⁸ While Beale may have gone too far in his assessment of the importance

⁹⁷ Cf. van Unnik, “Formula,” 87; see also Beale (*John’s Use of the Old Testament*, 182-83).

⁹⁸ Rev 1:19 has ἃ μέλλει γενέσθαι μετὰ ταῦτα whereas Dan 2:45 (Th) has ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι μετὰ ταῦτα. In Rev 4:1 the expression is identical to the Theodotion of Daniel, ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι μετὰ ταῦτα.

of Daniel, claiming that all of Revelation may be conceived within the framework of the dream in chapter two of Daniel,⁹⁹ the allusion to Daniel gives the Danielic perspective a commanding influence on this expression. W. C. van Unnik's discovery of terms in extrabiblical literature that are closely related to the entire phrase in Revelation 1:19 actually follows the trajectory established for the phrase as it appears in Daniel. It indicates a profound, comprehensive disclosure. Thus, as van Unnik comments on a similar expression in Egyptian mystery literature, what is to be revealed is "the totality of existence in its three aspects of past, present and future."¹⁰⁰ This view applies to all of Revelation, and it also has the connotation of a formula establishing the credentials of a true prophet. "It was required that he could survey by divine inspiration the whole of history in its three aspects of past, present and future," says van Unnik.¹⁰¹ While the preoccupation of the biblical version is theological rather than philosophical, the comprehensive scope of reality in Revelation also covers the beginning, the middle, and the end. To the explicit evidence that Revelation depicts the final undoing and end of evil, the proposed prophetic formula in Revelation 1:19 adds the strong possibility that it also has something to say about its origin.

J. Ramsey Michaelis derives from this phrase a complementary insight. Following an old translation by Moses Stuart to "write now what things thou has seen, and what things are, and what is to take place," Michaelis argues that *ἃ ἐστὶν* refers to "what the vision 'means'

⁹⁹ G. K. Beale, "The Influence of Daniel upon the Structure and Theology of John's Apocalypse," *JETS* 27 (1984), 413-23.

¹⁰⁰ van Unnik, "Formula," 88.

¹⁰¹ van Unnik, "Formula," 89. Beale (*John's Use of the Old Testament*, 183-87) finds fault with van Unnik's proposal, but his own evidence in its support, i.e. the emphasis on all-inclusiveness, seems more weighty than his arguments against van Unnik's approach. Even when Rev 1:19 is seen as an allusion to Daniel (Dan 2:28, 45), there is a comprehensive sweep to Daniel's interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream. Moreover, the range of Revelation's field of reference moves the boundary markers still further to the outer limits of past and future. Revelation's disclosure of "what is to take place" (1:19) and even "what *must* take place" (1:1; 4:1; 22:6) is inextricably linked to the voices and stories of the past and is comprehensible only in the light of the full and unified biblical narrative.

or 'signifies.'"¹⁰² Revelation 1:19 is here to be seen not so much as a key to the structure of Revelation as a clue to its narrative technique. That is to say, "the Book of Revelation claims to be dealing with *reality*. It is not merely a record of what someone saw, but an account of what *is* or what is *true*, whether in the present or the future."¹⁰³ The practical consequences of this reading corresponds to van Unnik's proposal that Revelation aspires toward a comprehensive disclosure, and the subject matter of the disclosure is reality in its cosmic and historical dimensions.

In sum, the structure of Revelation contains too many elements to be absorbed by any of the suggested outlines. Widely accepted features that are important for the present study are the main division occurring with the ascent to the heavenly throne room in Revelation 4:1, the affirmation of the heavenly location and intensification of the heavenly perspective in Revelation 12, the cycles indicating recapitulation as well as gradation and progression, and the emphasis on discernment. The dialogical and liturgical elements in the structure of Revelation show that the church, defective though it is found to be in the introductory messages to the seven churches, is the object of God's vigilant regard. Revelation promises a full disclosure, encompassing what the author has seen, "what is, and what is to take place after this" (1:19).

Old Testament Allusions in Revelation

A number of scholars are emphasizing the need to pay much closer attention to the Old Testament for the understanding of the entire New Testament than was previously the

¹⁰² J. Ramsay Michaelis, "Revelation 1.19 and the Narrative Voices of the Apocalypse," *NST* 37 (1991), 606-7.

¹⁰³ Michaelis, "Revelation 1.19," 619.

custom.¹⁰⁴ No New Testament book bears the imprint of the Old Testament as much as Revelation, but Revelation also presents the unique challenge that no other book claims to the same extent to be the fruit of a visionary experience. The latter feature is held in the foreground from the beginning; the author reports that he was “in the spirit” (1:10; 4:2; 17:3; 21:10), and references to visual and auditory input are common throughout his composition. Using terms conveying the privileged immediacy of the revelation, John writes “I heard” (ἤκουσα) a total of twenty-seven times, and “I saw” (εἶδον) even more frequently, a total of forty-five times. The question whether visionary experience rather than Old Testament allusions should guide the interpretation of Revelation is therefore highly relevant, and there are interpreters on both sides of this issue. On this point, Ian Boxall argues for the priority of the visionary aspect over the literary character of Revelation, audition and vision also being the genuine literary coinage of the apocalyptic genre.¹⁰⁵

But the point has already been made that Revelation strains the boundaries of ‘apocalypse’ as literary genre. Farrer’s discussion of the nature of John’s inspiration leads to further reservations in this respect.¹⁰⁶ By looking at the meticulous composition of John’s work, Farrer challenges the view that Revelation’s author was mostly a charismatic visionary whose primary contact with God is mediated through ecstatic experience in the order of standard definitions of apocalyptic literature.¹⁰⁷ While not denying the reality of visionary experiences, such experiences are to Farrer an inadequate explanation for the language of Revelation and its ceaseless use of scriptural allusions and metaphors. His author is more

¹⁰⁴ Important studies documenting this trend are D. A. Carson and H. G. M. Williamson, eds., *It Is Written: Scripture Citing Scripture* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul*; Craig A. Evans and W. Richard Stegner, eds., *The Gospels and the Scriptures of Israel* (JSNTSup 104; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994); Craig A. Evans and James A. Sanders, eds., *Early Christian Interpretation of the Scriptures of Israel* (JSNTSup 148; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997).

¹⁰⁵ Ian Boxall, *Revelation: Vision and Insight* (London: SPCK, 2002), 27-36.

¹⁰⁶ Farrer, *Revelation*, 23-29.

¹⁰⁷ This view of the nature of John’s *modus operandi* is reflected in Thompson (*Revelation*, 30-31).

than a passive recipient of revelation; he is also an active participant, and his book is above all the product of "intense and systematic meditation on the whole prophetic tradition."¹⁰⁸ Soaked in, and suffused by, the language and narratives of the Old Testament, Revelation appears to be "conceived in the very words in which it is written down; as though, in fact, the author was thinking with his pen."¹⁰⁹ The composition before the reader thus argues against a stereotype view of John as an ecstatic visionary, and it suggests a profound and organic relationship between Revelation and the narrative and prophetic themes of the Old Testament. Visionary experience is not excluded, but the visionary experience is conditioned by the scriptural meditation on a thematic level, not only on the level of language and metaphor.

How this relationship influences interpretation will vary among interpreters, but the conviction that careful attention to Old Testament textual antecedents holds the key to its meaning is essential. While Heinrich Kraft's claim that Old Testament prophecy is "the only source" on which John leans for support probably goes too far,¹¹⁰ he seems correct that "until we have succeeded in laying out the Old Testament source for an apocalyptic prophecy, we have not interpreted that passage."¹¹¹ Bauckham contends for an approach that pays close attention to the Old Testament setting and to the repeated use of certain allusions throughout Revelation. Allusions are in his view "meant to recall the Old Testament context, which thereby becomes part of the meaning the Apocalypse conveys, and to build up, sometimes by a network of allusion to the same Old Testament passage in various parts of the Apocalypse, an interpretation of whole passages of Old Testament prophecy."¹¹² Whether Revelation's

¹⁰⁸ Farrer, *Revelation*, 4.

¹⁰⁹ Farrer, *Revelation*, 24.

¹¹⁰ Heinrich Kraft, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes* (HNT 16A; Tübingen: Mohr, 1974), 16.

¹¹¹ Kraft, *Offenbarung*, 16.

¹¹² Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, xi.

use of the Old Testament qualifies as exegesis need not be settled in order to appreciate that the author of Revelation uses the Old Testament as the substrate of his own message and looks to the Old Testament to bring its own unveiling of God's ways to light.¹¹³ Possibly the best model is to see the relationship as reciprocal, a two-way street wherein it is just as likely that the Old Testament will unlock a passage in Revelation as to expect Revelation to unravel the Old Testament mystery.¹¹⁴ Even though a wealth of new insight has resulted from the endeavour of scholars who have invested great effort in uncovering and clarifying Revelation's literary qualities and its use of Old Testament allusions,¹¹⁵ this work may still be in its early stages, and it is a discipline that by its very nature will never be finished. Conversely, interpretations that pay little attention to the echoes of the earlier texts in Scripture risk premature obsolescence for failing to heed those voices.¹¹⁶

Revelation treats the books of the Old Testament as a unified whole. Origen (ca. 185-254), blending a little exegesis with a lot of application, strikes a resonant cord in his

¹¹³ According to Bauckham (*Climax of Prophecy*, xvi), "John's central message has gone largely unrecognised because the way in which he conveys it, by subtle and disciplined allusion to the Old Testament, has not been appreciated."

¹¹⁴ Reciprocity in this respect means that if John's use of the Old Testament "consists in careful and deliberate exegesis of whole passages" (Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 246), the meaning of Revelation's symbolic language depends on the attentive appropriation of the Old Testament voice.

¹¹⁵ Important contributions to the use of the Old Testament in Revelation are Vanhoye, "Ézékial dans l'Apocalypse;" Trudinger, "Text of the Old Testament in the Book of Revelation;" G. K. Beale, *The Use of Daniel in Jewish Apocalyptic Literature and in the Revelation of St. John* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1984); idem., *John's Use of the Old Testament*; Vogelsang, "Ezekiel in the Book of Revelation;" J. Paulien, *Decoding Revelation's Trumpets: Allusions and the Interpretation of Rev 8:7-12* (Berrien Springs: Andrews University Press, 1988); J.-P. Ruiz, *Ezekiel in the Apocalypse: The Transformation of Prophetic Language in Revelation 16:17-19:10* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1989); Fekkes, *Isaiah in Revelation*; Moyise, *Old Testament in the Book of Revelation*; Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*; Ian Paul, "The Use of the Old Testament in Revelation 12," in *The Old Testament in the New Testament. Essays in Honour of J. L. North*, ed. Steve Moyise (JSNTSup 189; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 256-76.

¹¹⁶ No interpreter denies the extensive use of the Old Testament in Revelation. The shift in scholarly opinion relates to the explanatory power of this language for Revelation's message. Yarbrow Collins (*Crisis & Catharsis*, 149) sees the language of the Old Testament put to use in Revelation mostly in an allegorical and typological sense. Biblical imagery is used in order to express "in symbolic form the predicament of the hearers and provides it with a resolution." Schüssler Fiorenza (*Revelation*, 102, 136) claims priority for the author's historical and theological situation rather than the Old Testament. If the encyclopaedic commentary of David Aune (*Revelation*, 3 vols. [WBC; Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1996-1998]) has any weakness, it may be that it does not give enough weight to the Old Testament allusions in its interpretation of Revelation.

estimation of Revelation's view of the Old Testament. "But John, too, who eats one roll on which there is writing "on the back and on the front," has considered the whole Scripture as one book, which is found to be bitter in the perception of himself which comes to each of those who have known it."¹¹⁷ Revelation aims at absorbing the entire message of scripture into itself. The ending of Revelation even triggers the suspicion that John consciously sought to write the last book of 'the Bible.'¹¹⁸ An internal chiasm has been proposed for the compositional shape of Revelation,¹¹⁹ and the closing chapters leave the impression that the author is seeking to capture the outer edges of history, past and future. These chapters read roughly like a mirror image of the first chapters of Genesis and give the structural appearance of an all-compassing 'chiasm,' connecting the beginning of scripture with what did indeed become the ending.

Other markers to this effect abound. The scholarly distinction between Old Testament apocalyptic and prophecy seems lost on the author of Revelation. Historical narrative, legal code, poetry, prophecy, wisdom and apocalyptic are blended unapologetically into the new tapestry as a matter of course. Efforts to untangle the strands of this tapestry in the interest of aiding interpretation is worthwhile, but one must not lose sight of the whole or make the mistake of assuming that meaning is built merely by echoing the Old Testament. Those echoes are resonating within a cave wherein the worldview that will be described below in the context of the 'rhetorical situation' – familiarity with the whole of the subject matter – constitutes the bulk of the echoing surface and is its most important determinant.

¹¹⁷ Origen, *ComJn* 5.7.

¹¹⁸ Bauckham (*Revelation*, 144) describes Revelation as "a work of Christian prophecy which understands itself to be the culmination of the whole biblical prophetic tradition. Its continuity with Old Testament prophecy is deliberate and impressively comprehensive."

¹¹⁹ Kenneth A. Strand, *Interpreting the Book of Revelation* (Ann Arbor Publishers, 1976).

Only when this is recognised can one take full advantage of the earlier voices and listen as “the revisionary power of allusive echo generates new figuration.”¹²⁰

There is as yet no uniform standard for identifying allusions in Revelation.¹²¹ Structural and thematic parallel are said to carry more weight than verbal matches,¹²² but there is still the tendency to favour precise verbal parallels. This is not surprising, and the alleged superiority of structural and thematic parallels may founder on the shoal of the verbal requirement. Ultimately, the assumption of a structural and verbal parallel will have to meet some kind of minimum requirement on the verbal level. The resultant imprecision of this procedure is not easily overcome since John, as has already been noted, was most likely using a Semitic original, probably a Hebrew ‘Old Testament’ as the basis for his allusions. He was also writing at a time when a degree of fluidity of the text among various recensions must be assumed. Thus, the identification of an allusion cannot only look to the Septuagint for support. It must also assess carefully to what degree an expression in the Greek of Revelation meets the requirement of an acceptable translation of the underlying Hebrew text of the Old Testament. Ideally, textual variants should also be considered.

Moreover, to the extent that subtlety, hints, and whispers are part of allusive compositions, the risk of imprecision is further increased. When Moyise, speaking in defence of the weaker voices, writes that since “we would not expect a music critic to limit his or her comments to the loudest instruments in the orchestra,”¹²³ the implication is that some allusions hardly make it to the surface. But this analogy could be misleading. While the music critic on rare occasions may single out any instrument in an orchestra for special

¹²⁰ John Hollander, *The Figure of Echo* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), ix.

¹²¹ In one study, Jon Paulien (“Criteria and the Assessment of Allusions to the Old Testament in the Book of Revelation,” in *Revelation*, ed. Moyise, 201) examined hundreds of suggested allusions in a total of ten commentaries, finding that for Rev 1-5 alone, no more than three allusions have the full support of all ten.

¹²² Paulien, *Revelation's Trumpets*, 185-86.

¹²³ Moyise, *Old Testament in Revelation*, 18.

mention, it is the impression of the performance as a whole that is critiqued, and the merits of a proposed allusion must likewise fall back on a totality of factors. Failure to meet the verbal requirement would be the equivalent of hitting the wrong note, a mistake that is sure to be noticed by the music critic and the exegete alike. Nevertheless, it must be acknowledged that significant echoes can hinge on a single word,¹²⁴ on a revision of familiar sights,¹²⁵ or on the translation of a Hebrew phrase into Greek.¹²⁶ We find ourselves listening to a symphony that can only be comprehended by the sensitised ear. To some extent the interpreter is left with the actual music rather than the musical score, and the quest for a schematised, formulaic tool by which to identify and weigh proposed allusions, is unlikely to close this gap fully.¹²⁷

Theological bias and presuppositions may also play a role in the selection and evaluation of possible allusions. The present interpretation will argue that Isaiah 14:12-20 is the background for the falling (8:10) and fallen (9:1) star in Revelation's trumpet sequence, and that this passage also is relevant to the crucial war-in-heaven theme in Revelation 12:7-9. The passage in question not only meets the basic verbal requirement, but it also offers a thematic parallel. The plausibility of this view is further strengthened by the suggestion that there is "a network of allusion to the same Old Testament passage in various parts of the Apocalypse," as noted earlier.¹²⁸ Fekkes' doubt in regard to the Isaiah passage leaves the

¹²⁴ The image of the victorious remnant on Mount *Zion* in Rev 14:1 echoes many possible OT passages, such as 2 Kings 19:30-31.

¹²⁵ "Look! He is coming with the clouds; every eye will see him, even those who pierced (ἐξεκέντησαν) him; and on his account all the tribes of the earth will wail. So it is to be. Amen" (Rev 1:7). This text conflates Dan 7:13 and Zech 12:10, translates the key word 'pierced' from the Hebrew of Zechariah, and universalises Zechariah's "house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem" to "all the tribes of the earth." It also leaves a tantalising link to the piercing of Jesus reported in John 19:37.

¹²⁶ If Trudinger ("Old Testament in the Book of Revelation," 87) is correct, such a translation is evident when John translates אֲנִי אֲשֶׁר אֲהִיָּה ("I AM WHO I AM") as ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ᾔων καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος, as noted earlier.

¹²⁷ Something along this line has been suggested by Paulien ("Allusions," 121). Saying that a systematic approach will not close the gap between the Old Testament voice and echoes in Revelation does not mean that further work on this subject is without value.

¹²⁸ Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, xi.

impression that his view is dictated in part by theological misgivings as to the consequences of allowing Isaiah's poem about the fall of the brightest star to play a role in Revelation.¹²⁹

In that case the merit of the case loses out to theological factors even though it has passed the stipulated verbal entrance examination. Theological discomfort also appears in Paulien's ambivalence with regard to a link between the passage in Isaiah and the falling star in connection with the third trumpet (8:10). Admitting this as a definite allusion makes the falling star the agent of destruction rather than the object of God's judgment, a reversal of roles that imperils Paulien's theological interpretation.¹³⁰

Even when a certain allusion has been identified, it is for the reader to determine how it should be understood. This possibility puts the protracted exchange between a scholar who is intent on probing for authorial intent in Revelation's use of the Old Testament and one who is less optimistic in that regard in a different light.¹³¹ Seeking to understand what the author meant need not succumb to hermeneutical despair as if such a stance is bound to lead nowhere.¹³² But advocacy of authorial intent must be tempered by the recognition that the Old Testament horizon itself offers more than one interpretative option. Even to the one who holds out for the possibility that some grasp of the author's intention is within reach, interpretation will not simply be a matter of 'cut and paste,' and the quest for a predictable

¹²⁹ Fekkes, *Isaiah in Revelation*, 186.

¹³⁰ Paulien, *Revelation's Trumpets*, 396.

¹³¹ Beale and Moyise, both of whom are authors of significant books on the use of the Old Testament in Revelation, have carried on a spirited debate on authorial intent and reader understanding in the light of allusions to the Old Testament in Revelation with Paulien in a mediating role; cf. S. Moyise, "The Old Testament in the New: A Reply to Greg Beale," *IBS* 21(1999), 54-58; idem., "Authorial Intention and the Book of Revelation," *AUSS* 39 (2001), 35-40; idem., "Does the Author of Revelation Misappropriate the Scriptures," *AUSS* 40 (2002), 3-21; G. K. Beale, "Questions of Authorial Intent, Epistemology, and Presuppositions and Their Bearing on the Study of the Old Testament in the New: A Rejoinder to Steve Moyise," *IBS* 21 (1999), 152-180; idem., "A Response to Jon Paulien on the Use of the Old Testament in Revelation," *AUSS* 39 (2001), 23-34; see also J. Paulien, "Dreading the Whirlwind: Intertextuality and the Use of the Old Testament in Revelation," *AUSS* 39 (2001), 5-22.

¹³² Cf. Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse: Philosophical reflections on the claim that God speaks* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 130-52.

outcome may not be as tidy as some advocates of authorial intent envision. On the other hand, promoters of 'surplus of meaning'¹³³ may need to concede that neglected surplus remains to be excavated in the Old Testament as much as in the imagination of the contemporary reader. In the absence of any canon of allusions in Revelation and in recognition of the likelihood that a definitive reference work may be out of reach, Revelation's use of the Old Testament must be weighed on a case-by-case basis, respectful of the work that has been done and mindful that it has not been finished.

The 'Rhetorical Situation' of Revelation

Attention to what Revelation says about God's method takes on additional meaning in the light of the cosmic conflict depicted in the book. Here terminology from rhetorical criticism is useful. Rather than discussing the circumstances within which Revelation originated under familiar terms such as 'background,' 'milieu,' or 'setting,' Schüssler Fiorenza opts for the more specialised concept 'rhetorical situation.'¹³⁴ This term includes the attempt to identify the problem the book is addressing, but it also looks at what the message of Revelation seeks to accomplish. The key element in the concept as originally described by Lloyd Bitzer is "an exigence which strongly invites utterance."¹³⁵ In simpler terms this is to be understood as an urgent need arising in the course of events – the 'situational' part of the equation. But this situation of need is rhetorical only if it may somehow be affected, modified, and transformed by addressing it – the 'rhetorical' part. Basic to the concept as it was first introduced, is the situation itself. When describing the situation, Bitzer repeatedly states that it "dictates"

¹³³ Here the Ricoeurian concept of 'surplus of meaning' that is intrinsic to the subsequent reading of all written texts, especially texts that abound in metaphor, needs to be specified as more than a general property of literature (Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* [Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1976]). In Revelation there is the additional and more essential 'surplus' that is implied by the author, a surplus that lies within the Old Testament author's purview and conscious intention.

¹³⁴ Cf. Schüssler Fiorenza, *Revelation*, 183-99.

¹³⁵ Lloyd F. Bitzer, "The Rhetorical Situation," *PR* 1 (1968), 4.

observations as well as the verbal response. "So controlling is situation that we should consider it the very ground of rhetorical activity, whether that activity is primitive and productive of simple utterance or artistic and productive of the Gettysburg Address."¹³⁶

On the basis of these concepts Schüssler Fiorenza derives a third premise – very germane and lucid, I believe – and one that has far-reaching consequences. It is that a grasp of the rhetorical situation determines the relevance of the book to subsequent readers.¹³⁷ If the 'situation' of the reader differs substantially from the 'situation' of Revelation, the book will fail to strike a resonant cord, or it may send the reader scurrying in the wrong direction. Putting the proposition in somewhat inelegant terms, it means that if 'this' is not your rhetorical situation – once that situation has been defined – this book is not for you.¹³⁸ On this point Schüssler Fiorenza articulates what has long been the implicit fate of Revelation.

The first constituent of the rhetorical situation as defined above does not differ much from less literary ways of portraying the *Sitz im Leben* of Revelation. It is held to be obvious that "Revelation was written at time when the Christians of Asia Minor, and probably other places as well, were being persecuted by the Roman officials for their refusal to worship the emperors."¹³⁹ This position holds the key to identifying some of the leading figures in Revelation; Babylon as Rome; the first beast in Revelation 13 as the emperor cult; the second beast in this sequence as the imperial priesthood; and the seven heads of the beast as Roman emperors, one of whom refers to Nero.¹⁴⁰ This understanding is further aided by a generative

¹³⁶ Bitzer, "Rhetorical Situation," 5.

¹³⁷ In Schüssler Fiorenza's words (*Revelation*, 199), "wherever a totally different 'rhetorical situation' exists, however, the book no longer elicits a 'fitting' response. What I am arguing here is that we should not reduce 'the reader' to a timeless, ideal reader because in so doing we essentialize and dehistoricize the book."

¹³⁸ Revelation may still be seen as an *interesting* book, read with bewildered or bemused detachment, but it does not reach the level of an *important* book unless the requisite rhetorical situation as this has been understood, arises again.

¹³⁹ Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 779-80; see also *idem*, *Revelation 17-22*, 959-61.

¹⁴⁰ E.g. Barclay Newman, "The Fallacy of the Domitian Hypothesis," *NTS* 10 (1963), 133.

element assigned to the genre of apocalyptic: Apocalyptic literature originates at a time of real or perceived crisis.¹⁴¹ Since Revelation is apocalyptic literature, there must be a crisis.

The short version of the situation of Revelation is the disclosure given in the beginning of the book, "I, John, both your brother and companion in the tribulation (θλίψις) and kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was on the island that is called Patmos for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ. I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day, and I heard behind me a loud voice, as of a trumpet..." (1:9-10, NKJV). External evidence and most scholars concur that these verses signify events during the reign of the emperor Domitian.¹⁴² Ingredients that substantiate the standard view are thought to be present in the passage: Domitian was a notorious persecutor of Christians, and John had been banished to Patmos as the victim of persecution. In this context the word θλίψις does not describe general or trivial distress but outright and hardheaded persecution. On the basis of the testimony of Pliny the Younger,¹⁴³ Tacitus,¹⁴⁴ Suetonius,¹⁴⁵ and Dio Cassius,¹⁴⁶ whose versions are incorporated into Eusebius' account,¹⁴⁷ Domitian acquired the reputation as a megalomaniacal and cruel instigator of persecution on a large scale.

¹⁴¹ Hanson (*Dawn of Apocalyptic*, 1) more than hints that the resurgence of apocalyptic in our time parallels the *Zeitgeist* of gloom that in his eyes gave rise to apocalyptic in the first place. Quite similar is Rowland's view (*Open Heaven*, 9) that apocalyptic arose (and arises) in an attempt to resolve the "contrast between theological affirmations and historical realities" when this contrast becomes unbearable.

¹⁴² The most important external witness to the Domitian date is Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* 5.30.3. On this point most interpreters agree.

¹⁴³ Pliny (born c. 60 CE), *Panegyricus* 48-49 (trans. Betty Radice; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969), 429-31.

¹⁴⁴ Tacitus, *Agricola* 39-44 (trans. W. Hamilton Fyfe; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1908), 80-85.

¹⁴⁵ Suetonius (b. c. 70 CE), *Domitian* 10.2; 11.1; 13.2; 15.1, in *The Twelve Caesars* (trans. Robert Graves; Harmondsworth: Penguin Classics, 1979), 299-314.

¹⁴⁶ Dio Cassius, *Roman History*, book 67.4.7; 67.11.3 (trans. Earnest Cary; The Loeb Classical Library; London: William Heinemann, 1925), VIII, 329, 341.

¹⁴⁷ Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* III.14-20.

However, it has emerged from a scrutiny of these sources that Domitian may not have been quite the villain he is reported to be.¹⁴⁸ Historians and writers of that period were acutely sensitive politically. They did not write history only to pass on certain facts to posterity but were also colorizing the picture in order to ingratiate themselves with Domitian's successor Trajan. History, as reflected in the work of these writers, aimed to please as much as to tell the truth. On the evidence of a more 'neutral' assessment, persecution under Domitian was sporadic and rather scant.¹⁴⁹ This revision of the standard view of persecution requires a reconsideration of the situation that led to the writing of Revelation. According to Yarbrow Collins, Revelation does not reflect a self-evident crisis easily and widely recognised. If there were a crisis, it was not seen as such, and if seen as such, only one person or very few perceived it. "Rather than simply consoling his fellow

¹⁴⁸ Thompson (*Apocalypse and Empire*, 95-115) makes a strong case for propagandistic elements in the written records of imperial Rome during Domitian and Trajan. Writers and historians who shaped Domitian's reputation used the alleged evils of his reign as foil in order to praise and magnify Trajan. The villainy of Domitian, which is not easily substantiated on the basis of more 'neutral' sources, serves to magnify the virtues of Trajan, and the latter's virtues are probably exaggerated. According to Thompson, reliable historical evidence is scant for the claim that Domitian imposed emperor worship and instigated large-scale persecution of Christians that many interpretations of Revelation impute to his reign. To Brian W. Jones (*The Emperor Domitian* [London: Routledge, 1992], 108-9, 114-17, 196-98), Domitian's reputation suffers from biased sources. Jones disputes the negative and possibly nasty assertions that Domitian sought or demanded divine appellations, and all but dismisses the notion of a Domitianic persecution. See also Ruurd R. Nauta, *Poetry for Patrons. Literary Communication in the Age of Domitian* (Leiden: Brill, 2002).

¹⁴⁹ Jörg Ulrich ("Euseb, HistEccl III, 14-20 und die Frage nach der Christenverfolgung unter Domitian," *ZNW* 87 [1996], 269-89) shows that the 'proofs' amassed by Eusebius do not constitute evidence against Domitian because Eusebius merely incorporates claims in support of a predetermined conclusion. Thomas B. Slater ("On the Social Setting of the Revelation to John," *NTS* 44 [1998], 232-56) accepts Thompson's thesis that Domitian did not embark on systematic persecution of Christians, but he qualifies it in several respects. Just as Pliny, Suetonius and others may have exploited a caricature of Domitian in order to flatter their patron, writers during Domitian's reign may have done the same thing. Besides, there is evidence that Domitian received divine honours. Slater contends that although the Christians were not persecuted systematically, they were discriminated against, harassed, and oppressed. In his view this 'low-level' or implied oppression should be seen as the social setting of Revelation. In an overview of imperial appellations prior to Domitian, Floyd O. Parker, Jr. ("Our Lord and God' in Rev 4,11: Evidence for the Late Date of Revelation?" *Bib* 82 [2001], 207-31), presents evidence that the situation during Domitian's reign was not new in kind or degree. Giancarlo Biguzzi ("John on Patmos and the 'Persecution' in the Apocalypse," *Estudios Biblicos* 56 [1998], 201-220), on the other hand, contends that the question as to whether Domitian was a persecutor is virtually irrelevant since the evidence for persecution in his view is clearly established by the text of Revelation, notably the generative theodicy question in 6:9-10.

Christians in a situation of grave crisis," she asserts, John "wrote his book to point out a crisis that many of them did not perceive."¹⁵⁰

If this is the case, we need to reassess the ingrained view of the 'situation' of Revelation as well as the concept of the 'rhetorical situation.' As to the situation itself, described in everyday terms, the threat to the Christians appears to have been less than what is assumed by the traditional view. As to the rhetorical situation, the revision is more dramatic because it can no longer be said that the situation is obvious, so obvious that it more or less dictates and compels the response. Revelation, then, appears to describe and confront a situation that is not uniformly clear and readily apparent, and the ambiguity of the generating factors is so relentless that it threatens to call the concept of the rhetorical situation itself into question.

In fact, a dissenting view has already claimed as a general feature of 'rhetorical situations' that the crucial element is *not* the situation. The crux is rather the way the situation is viewed. The situation itself may be obscure, confusing, and conceptually inert, but it rises to significance by the point of view brought to bear on it. It is the speaker and not the situation that creates the significance. Even Gettysburg is remembered more for the Gettysburg Address than for the Battle of Gettysburg; Lincoln was wrong or unduly humble when he claimed that "the world will not long remember what is said here, but it will remember what they did here." It follows that "statements may ostensibly describe situations, but they actually only inform us as to the phenomenological perspective of the speaker."¹⁵¹ On this revised view of the rhetorical situation "rhetoric is a *cause* and not an *effect* of meaning. It is antecedent, not subsequent, to a situation's impact."¹⁵²

¹⁵⁰ Yarbrow Collins, *Crisis & Catharsis*; 77, cf. Sweet, *Revelation*, 27-35.

¹⁵¹ Richard E. Vatz, "The Myth of the Rhetorical Situation," *PR* 6 (1973), 154.

¹⁵² Vatz, "Myth," 160.

To clarify the issue up to this point, the notion of a rhetorical situation remains useful as a heuristic device for shedding light on factors that gave rise to Revelation.¹⁵³ The concept needs to be modified, however, emphasising that the rhetoric of Revelation represents the chosen point of view of the speaker and is not altogether self-evident or intrinsic to the situation. Most interpreters, including Schüssler Fiorenza, appear to follow the view that Revelation speaks to a recognised crisis, applying rhetoric appropriate to the situation. Yarbro Collins, on the other hand, holds that the crisis was unrecognised, that John used rhetoric designed to precipitate awareness, and then sought to resolve the tension through catharsis that is also rhetorical. John's aim, she says, "was to create that tension for readers unaware of it, to heighten it for those who felt it already, and then to overcome it in an act of literary imagination."¹⁵⁴

The former position – seeing Revelation as the response to a known crisis – finds a measure of support in John's short version of his situation. We are led to believe that he had been banished to Patmos because the imperial government persecuted the Christians. But Revelation is also replete with hints and reminders of hidden and unseen danger. Even when the messages to the seven churches are read with the understanding that they refer primarily to the condition of the named churches in Asia Minor, the issue at hand is not self-evident to those who are part of it. In Sardis, the church sees herself and is seen by others as alive and vibrant, but the external review has a different verdict (3:1). The Laodicean church is blissfully ignorant of her true condition (3:15). The *sealed* scroll and the blowing of trumpets that occupy such a large part of Revelation are also metaphors signifying issues that either are not seen or not understood. If one part of the 'situation' in Revelation is

¹⁵³ The concept of the 'rhetorical situation' has survived criticism to become a staple of the armamentarium of rhetorical critics; cf. George A. Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation through Rhetorical Criticism* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 34-35.

¹⁵⁴ Yarbro Collins, *Crisis & Catharsis*, 141.

persecution, the 'rhetorical' part is that John was "in the Spirit" (1:10). This expression represents the chosen point of view of the speaker, and it cannot be taken for granted that "the Spirit" merely follows a perspective that will be obvious to all.¹⁵⁵ I take the position that Yarbrow Collins is profoundly correct when she claims that John "wrote his book to point out a crisis that many of them did not perceive."¹⁵⁶ But what is the unrecognised crisis?

On this point the present study will attempt to stake out a course that differs from the traditional tendency to ground Revelation in the historical reality of the Roman Empire. First, I suggest that the issues held up as important in Revelation derive from "the phenomenological perspective of the speaker" more than from the situation.¹⁵⁷ As phenomena thus identified it is important to pay attention to the speaker and to resist the tendency of the established view to blur or bias one's grasp of the situation and its rhetorical response. Second, Revelation takes aim at personal evil itself. What lies in the path of that line will be illumined and exposed, but the intervening manifestations must not eclipse or be mistaken for the ultimate target. Under the shifting landscape of history in Revelation lies the constant of personal evil. In this sense the message of Revelation may indeed describe a pattern of history repeating itself, culminating only when evil at last is a spent force.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁵ J. A. du Rand ("...Let Him Hear What the Spirit Says...": The Functional Role And Theological Meaning Of The Spirit In The Book Of Revelation," *Ex auditu* 12 [1996], 43-58) shows that the "seven Spirits" in Revelation (1:4; 3:1; 4:5; 5:6) not only symbolize the fullness of the Holy Spirit. The slaughtered Lamb, whose seven eyes represent "the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth" (5:6) alludes to Zech 4:10. This is a signifier of divine wisdom and of the method that derives from the divine ideal. It is implied that the full disclosure of this ideal has no counterpart on any level in the creaturely world.

¹⁵⁶ Yarbrow Collins, *Crisis & Catharsis*, 77.

¹⁵⁷ Vatz, "Myth," 154.

¹⁵⁸ Aune's suggestion (*Revelation 1-5*, xcii-xciii) that the repeated cycles of seven in Revelation indicate a recurring plot line in history is unconvincing, but the notion of history repeating itself certainly falls within the purview of Revelation's message.

One should therefore hesitate to accept Schüssler Fiorenza's conclusion that Revelation speaks to a limited and circumscribed situation.¹⁵⁹ Instead, it seems more prudent to heed the view that "most biblical prophecy was only preserved in the canon of Scripture because its relevance was not exhausted by its reference to its original context."¹⁶⁰ Finding persuasive evidence that Revelation also speaks to a crisis not perceived, I suggest that the merits for focusing on personal evil is more compelling than the role of the Roman Empire or any other proposed fulfilment of Revelation between John's day and ours. If the concept of the rhetorical situation is modified to mean that the 'exigency that invites utterance' primarily is an urgent need identified by the speaker, this perspective takes on added significance. John's claim that he was in the Spirit, heard voices, and saw visions, brings to view on the part of the speaker a perspective that allots a larger role to the reality of personal evil in the cosmos and in human history than is generally allowed. This means, then, that the rhetorical situation of Revelation is cognizant of an opposing will and agency to an extent that surpasses the role assigned to this element in many interpretations of the book. It is with an eye to this neglected element that this inquiry will proceed to examine the story line of Revelation under the twin metaphor of *disclosure and discernment*, the former signifying what is told and the latter denoting what is heard.

¹⁵⁹ As hinted already, this may be why Revelation is widely ignored. Readers do not find the requisite common ground between the 'rhetorical situation' of Revelation and their own, and the rhetoric of the book leaves them untouched.

¹⁶⁰ Bauckham, *Revelation*, 152.

Part Two

The Story Line in Revelation

CHAPTER THREE

DISCERNING THE STORY LINE FROM THE END

Introduction

In practical terms, the attempt to discern the story line in Revelation seems best served by approaching the book as though it consists of three parts, a beginning, a midpoint, and an ending. This three-fold division of a narrative is not unusual, but the approach taken here nevertheless explores these three parts in a sequence that is sufficiently idiosyncratic to warrant an explanation.

While books are generally read from the beginning to end, the present inquiry begins with the *ending* in order to allow startling twists in the narrative to play a decisive role in determining the actual story line of the entire book. If this seems contrary to common sense, it is hoped that the strategy will be vindicated in due course.¹

Two premises that can only be assumed at the outset will be subject to corroboration or contradiction in the process. One is that the story line that to the modern reader appears quite distinct toward the end of Revelation is in the mind of the author just as distinct at the beginning, though less so in the eyes of the contemporary audience.² The second premise is that the interpretation of Revelation

¹ David C. Steinmetz ("Uncovering a Second Narrative: Detective Fiction and the Construction of Historical Method," in *The Art of Reading Scripture* [eds. Ellen F. Davis and Richard B. Hays; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003], 54-65) aptly observes that reading the Bible back to front is, in fact, basic to the Christian interpretative endeavour. Indeed, many narratives are best or better understood from the point of view of the conclusion. "What appeared on first reading to have been an almost random succession of events now proves to have been nothing of the kind. If one reads the last chapter first, one discovers a complex and intelligible narrative guided unerringly to its destined end by the secret hand of its author. Under the circumstances, reading backwards is not merely a preferred reading strategy; it is the only sensible course of action for a reasonable person" (p 56).

² This is not an opportunistic claim. Since structural and thematic unity go hand in hand in Revelation, the expectation that the climax and ending of the author's story line is also present at the beginning takes priority over other possible constructs.

often fails to give the peculiar ending its due. As the present interpretation perceives it, Revelation's closing chapters contain elements that stand out starkly in the story, rising like towering peaks in the enigmatic narrative landscape. Allowing for the possibility that other readers may not find these narrative features as enchanting to the imagination or rewarding to interpretation as is granted here, they will at least be pointed out.

Moreover, this end-to-beginning survey will be accompanied by a progression in depth as to the meaning of Revelation's symbolic representation.³ This movement progresses from the top downwards. It begins by scanning the surface of the text, attentive to the evocative force of the imagery and metaphors as the first step on the way to deciphering its meaning. Deeper meaning is expected to emerge as the plot comes to light and the evidence of the narrative leads the way, especially when the author's copious use of the Old Testament is taken into consideration. In what follows, then, the movement goes in two directions, from the end to the beginning and from the surface downwards.

The Enigmatic Ending of Revelation

It is the story of the final undoing of Satan toward the end of Revelation that creates perplexity even where the narrative of Revelation has been the reader's only source up to that point.

Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain. He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, and threw him into the pit, and locked and sealed it

³ This progression seeks to unravel the meaning of the symbolic language. Vern Sheridan Poythress ("Genre and Hermeneutics in Rev 20:1-6," *JETS* 36 [1993], 46-47) gives an example of how this might work for the wounded head in Rev 13:3 that subsequently was healed. "Will it involve and actual physical wound to a human individual? Or will it involve structural damage to an institution? Or simply a temporary eclipse of power and influence? Or all of these?"

over him, so that he would deceive the nations no more, until the thousand years were ended. After that he must be let out for a little while.

Rev 20:1-3

Satan is defined in the story as the unrelenting protagonist of deceit. Since firm and effective intervention is at last deployed against him in the form of a key, a massive chain, and a prison, it is legitimate to ask: Why were these measures not put to use at an earlier point in the drama? What has happened to warrant the decisive intervention now? And what is the point of the time-limit on the opponent's confinement? The most perplexing feature, no doubt, lies in the announcement that after the thousand-year confinement Satan "*must* be let out for a little while" (20:3). Hardly any reader will be prepared for that. According to literary analysts the test for a 'round' character is a personality that "is capable of surprising in a convincing way."⁴ What happens here to the character of Satan certainly comes as a surprise, but it is more doubtful whether the reported turn of events meets the stipulated test for a round character. Most readers will agree that the narrative takes an unexpected turn, but it is the narrative that is 'round' and not the character of Satan. He is seized, which comes as a surprise to no one, and then released, which is surprising, but neither of these actions can be attributed to his initiative. If Satan is seen as round, the reason must be that the news of his imprisonment and subsequent release show that the narrative treats him as round character. Or, more precisely, the events in the narrative may be taken as evidence that Satan *was* a round character at some point, and the lingering shell of the lost personality plays out in startling ways at the end of Revelation. What Satan proceeds to do upon his release does not come as a bombshell (20:7-9).

⁴ Forster, *Aspects of the Novel*, 78.

The unsettling news of Satan's release strikes with particular force the one who has arrived at this point in Revelation by way of the narrative world of the Old Testament. Where the Old Testament plays such a conditioning role, the final stages in Satan's career will initially intensify the sense of bewilderment and disbelief. Whatever the meaning of the other aliases by which the adversarial figure is here described, there can be no doubt that the designation ὁ ὄφις ὁ ἀρχαῖος (20:2; cf. 12:9) is intended to bring the Genesis narrative of the fall into the mental picture (Gen 3:1).⁵ Since this phrase recalls the entire passage from which it is culled, two simple consequences seem to follow. The first is that the author of Revelation appears to picture Satan in the end-time drama as the same *character* that played a critical role in the Genesis account of the fall. The second prospect of this allusion is that the conflict described in Revelation also resonates with the *issues* raised in the discussion in the Genesis narrative.⁶ If so, this allusion suggests that the reader of Revelation is alerted not only to the respective characters of the end-time drama but also to its plot and story line.⁷

The report of the release of Satan comes as a surprise even if the track record of his activity in Revelation alone is kept in view. When events in Revelation spell

⁵ When Bauckham (*Climax of Prophecy*, 246) contends that John's use of the Old Testament "consists in careful and deliberate exegesis of whole passages," the point is not that Revelation retells whole passages, which it does not. It is rather that the author sets the whole passage before the reader by merely alluding to a small part. The genius of Revelation does not lie in a smattering of Old Testament incidents and characters dispersed aimlessly throughout the text. These allusions are there in order to convey meaning, requiring engagement with the whole of the passage for its meaning to come to light. Thus the view (Bauckham, *Revelation*, 18) that "the Old Testament allusions frequently presuppose their Old Testament context and a range of connexions between Old Testament texts which are not made explicit but lie beneath the surface of the text of Revelation."

⁶ Dietrich Bonhoeffer (*Creation and Fall: A Theological Interpretation of Genesis 1-3* [trans. John C. Fletcher; London: SCM Press, 1959], 67) states that "with the first religious question in the world evil has come upon the scene."

⁷ On this point Ian Paul ("Old Testament in Revelation 12," 269) claims that "many of the allusions to the Old Testament function in such a way as to identify the characters rather than describe the action of the plot."

the defeat of this figure, pointedly naming him “the *ancient* serpent,” it lies close at hand to conclude that the author has in mind the end of “the master and the instigator” of evil of the Genesis narrative of the fall.⁸ Still more intriguing is the possibility that the enigmatic release of Satan has a logic that requires attention to his background and record in the biblical narrative. This suggestion claims a measure of respectability since interpreters so far find themselves at a loss before the most puzzling question: Why is Satan released after his enforced confinement only to be allowed to resume his deceptive work, as Revelation unambiguously avers?

When the thousand years are ended, Satan will be released from his prison and will come out to deceive the nations at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, in order to gather them for battle; they are as numerous as the sands of the sea. They marched up over the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city. And fire came down from heaven and consumed them.

Rev 20:7-9

Farrer puts the disquieting matter in much the same terms as any reader, “But why is Satan merely bound and why is he ever to be loosed again?”⁹ Other scholars follow suit with variations on the same theme. “Why,” asks Caird, “once Satan had been securely sealed in the abyss, **must he be let loose** to wreak further havoc? And what claim does he have on God, that God is bound to give the Devil his due?”¹⁰ “But why, theologically, must he be *loosed to deceive the nations*?” queries Sweet,¹¹ using this passage as the springboard for a more sweeping scrutiny of God’s dealing with this agent. “Why did he have to come down to earth with great wrath? Why

⁸ Elian Cuvillier, “Apocalypse 20: Prédiction ou Prédication?” *ETR* 59 (1984), 346.

⁹ Farrer, *Revelation*, 202.

¹⁰ G. B. Caird, *The Revelation of Saint John* (London: A. & C. Black, 1966; 2nd printing Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1999), 249.

¹¹ J. P. M. Sweet, *Revelation* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1979), 290.

could he not have been liquidated from the beginning?"¹² Boring, sensitised by the way an ordinary person is likely to react to this text, writes, "The question occurs to every reader of this text, 'Once Satan is bound and the earth enjoys a millennium of undemonized celebration, why 'must' he be released again?'"¹³ Roloff addresses the same subject, "Why is Satan released from his prison?"¹⁴ "Just why this is done, and by whom, is an undisclosed mystery," says Metzger.¹⁵ Resseguie, safeguarding the concerns of the vigilant narrative reader, brings to the table questions slightly less expansive than the ones asked above by Sweet, "Why not simply destroy Satan at the beginning of the thousand-year period? Why is it important that Satan is *not* destroyed during the millennial period?"¹⁶ Talbert puts the question most succinctly, "What is the point?"¹⁷

The Significance of the Ending of Revelation

In the paragraphs that follow, four possible answers to the questions raised above will be examined. The first view to be considered asserts that there is something wrong with the text, making the passage virtually unintelligible. Second, it has been implied that the author at this point in the narrative is losing interest in the story, and for that reason the modern reader should not be overly concerned to track down 'the point' in the unedited text. Third, interpreters have put forward a range of suggestions as to the

¹² Sweet, *Revelation*, 290.

¹³ M. Eugene Boring, *Revelation* (Interpretation; Louisville: John Knox Press, 1989), 208.

¹⁴ Roloff, *Revelation*, 228.

¹⁵ Bruce M. Metzger, *Breaking the Code: Understanding the Book of Revelation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), 93.

¹⁶ Resseguie, *Revelation Unsealed*, 25.

¹⁷ Charles H. Talbert, *The Apocalypse* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), 95.

meaning of the binding and release of Satan, all with varying degrees of persuasive appeal. Finally, the present thesis will propose that the binding and release of Satan at the very least makes him an important character in the narrative.

Argument against the Text

As it stands, the text so baffles interpreters that it comes as no surprise to find scholars who argue that the problem lies in the textual raw material itself. This is the considered view of Charles, who sees the otherwise stellar composition of Revelation fissuring at this point, defying any logic or coherent train of thought. Charles includes Revelation 20:1-3 in the work of the initial composer, but from there on the discontinuities are to his mind so overwhelming that the spirit and genius of the original master seem absent, and his absence throws the significance of the tail end of the prior composition in jeopardy. "These chapters have hitherto been a constant source of insurmountable difficulty to the exegete. They are full of confusion and contradiction if the text is honestly dealt with," writes Charles.¹⁸ He finds intolerable disarray in the text of Revelation 20:4-22,¹⁹ requiring a remedial explanation that would seem audacious by any standard if not for the fact that it is deemed necessary by one of the greatest Revelation scholars of all time. Charles' view, which is as radical in nature as it is bold in specificity, is that John died "*when he had completed i.-xx.3 of his work, and that the materials for its completion, which were for the most part ready in a series of independent documents, were put together by a faithful but unintelligent disciple in the order which he thought right.*"²⁰ Needless to say, Charles' verdict on the efforts of this unintelligent disciple is not that he succeeded.

¹⁸ Charles, *Revelation II*, 144.

¹⁹ Charles, *Revelation II*, 147.

²⁰ Charles, *Revelation II*, 147.

Arguments against Any 'Point' in the Unedited Text

While Charles' indictment of the text has not generated much support, other scholars are reluctant to engage the implications of the passage, diluting its force and meaning simply by neglecting it. In sharp distinction from the impression of the ordinary reader, Ernst Lohmeyer finds the suspense and sense of conflict diminished in the narrative as though the Seer has lost interest in what he is describing.²¹ Kraft is also impressed by the author's alleged loss of interest in his material, holding this assumption as alibi for not offering any substantive exegesis of the passage.²² Many readers are likely to dissent from this dismissive attitude, arguing that it is the interpreter and not the author who has succumbed to fatigue, regrettably so in the face of one of the greatest theological puzzles of Revelation. Against the argument of authorial loss of focus, such readers will agree heartily with the contention that the passage under consideration "has not received the attention it deserves."²³ A narrative reader will be particularly provoked at such insensitivity to surprising turns in the story, expecting instead intensified scrutiny of the plot in order to make sense of the account.²⁴

The view of the interpreters noted above is in part influenced by the more widespread notion that the author at this stage has ceded control of the story line to stock-in-trade concepts of apocalyptic. He is, as it were, dutifully going through the motions of the standard apocalyptic scheme, but his heart is not in it, and this serves

²¹ Ernest Lohmeyer, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes* (HNT 16; Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1953), 161.

²² Kraft, *Offenbarung*, 258.

²³ Christopher Rowland, *Revelation* (Epworth Commentaries; London: Epworth Press, 1993), 147.

²⁴ Cf. Resseguie, *Revelation Unsealed*, 25.

as a note of caution to interpreters who are anxious to make sense of the passage.

This reluctance appears to be the drift of William Barclay's introductory caveat that "the origin of this doctrine is not specifically Christian," deriving instead from the weed-infested soil of Jewish apocalyptic.²⁵ Caird rejects any interpretation that makes the author a slavish purveyor of a standardised apocalyptic scheme, but he implies a similar rigid subservience to elements of Old Testament prophecy, specifically to the prophet Ezekiel – even if the price of this suspected subservience is an unintelligible story.²⁶

One strategy adopted by interpreters who may differ widely as to their view of the author's sources, his level of interest in the subject, authorial intent, or interpretative persuasion is to assign the description of the binding and release of Satan to matters inscrutable. Why, indeed, would Satan be seized, chained and imprisoned for a thousand years, and why, more urgently, would such a character be released from prison when there is no reason to expect a change in his behaviour? Swete is content to note that "there is a necessity for it (δεῖ), founded on some

²⁵ William Barclay, *The Revelation of John*, 2 vols. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, rev. ed. 1976), II, 186. Roloff (*Revelation*, 226) combines Zoroastrian ideas and Jewish apocalyptic as likely sources of Revelation's description of the binding, imprisonment and release of Satan. *1 Enoch* is generally held to be the most significant quarry for these ideas in Jewish pre-Christian apocalyptic texts. Aune (*Revelation 16-22*, 1078) argues that the eschatological elements in Revelation 20 parallel those of *1 Enoch*, making it likely that "both authors are dependent on a traditional eschatological scenario." However, Carol Newsom ("The Development of *1 Enoch* 6-19: Cosmology and Judgment," *CBQ* 42 [1980], 310-29) provides an analysis of the Enochic material that weakens this assumption. In a summary of Newsom's findings relative to Revelation, Steven Thompson ("The End of Satan," *AUSS* 37 [1999], 260) makes the following observations regarding the emphasis in *1 Enoch*: 1. The final judgment is scarcely mentioned, and when it is, only as a peripheral concern; 2. The primary focus of the account, and the resolution to its problem, is contained within the antediluvian period; 3. Although the passage describes eschatological events such as the final judgment, those events are not central to the author's concerns; 4. No timetable of end-time events is presented. Several scholars advise a cautious approach with regard to Revelation's alleged indebtedness to sources outside the Old Testament; cf. Martin Kiddle, *The Revelation of St. John* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1940), 395; Farrer, *Revelation*, 30; Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 39.

²⁶ According to Caird (*Revelation*, 256), John "found this event prophesied in Ezekiel xxxviii-xxxix, and prophecies must have their fulfilment."

mystery of the Divine Will.”²⁷ Kraft says that the author merely reports this sequence of events without attempting an explanation.²⁸ Roloff concedes that the questions raised by this turn of events “remain unanswered.”²⁹ David MacLeod, representing a dispensationalist reading, concurs that there is a “must” (δεῖ) to Satan’s release, implying “logical necessity,” but the logic seems impenetrable. “For some reason, grounded in the divine will, Satan will be released and will deceive the nations again,” he observes.³⁰

Suggestions as to the Meaning of the Narrative

Sensing that it is untenable to leave their own questions and those of their readers unanswered, some scholars go a step further. Sweet, in answer to his own question why Satan could not have been liquidated from the beginning, attempts a reading that depersonalizes Satan in the interest of salvaging the meaning of this part of the story. Satan is not liquidated “because he represents man’s free will, the capacity God has given for sin, and the terrible reality of the consequences. *This* heaven and earth cannot exist without him.”³¹ His proposed resolution to the dilemma is to be found in “a new order of existence.”³² What this new order entails is only hinted, but the hint suggests that if Satan represents “man’s free will,” his delayed demise indicates that human beings one day will be delivered from the burden of having a free will.

²⁷ Swete, *Apocalypse*, 261.

²⁸ Kraft, *Offenbarung*, 254.

²⁹ Roloff, *Revelation*, 228.

³⁰ David J. MacLeod, “The Third ‘Last Thing’: The Binding of Satan (Rev. 20:1-3),” *BSac* 156 (1999), 483.

³¹ Sweet, *Revelation*, 290.

³² Sweet, *Revelation*, 290.

Boring appears ill at ease with the notion of Satan as a personal being, opting instead for an interpretation that grounds the logic of the narrative in the author's quest for adequate literary effects. In order to put the final send-off of evil on a footing appropriate to the task, the author "needs for this scene antagonists to God who are larger than life. Evil must be magnified to its fullest before being destroyed forever. In order to participate in this mythical scene, the devil 'must' be released to engage in his characteristic activity of 'deceiving the nations.'"³³

Talbert, replying to his own search for the rationale of the narrative, gives an answer that to this writer seems to point in quite the opposite direction of what appears to be his intention. God "binds the deceiver and sets up a period of time in which His will is perfectly clear and obvious to all. Nevertheless, it is all to no avail. When the deceiver is set free, he still proves...that humans cannot blame their sinfulness on their environment or circumstances."³⁴ Here, too, Satan and his release are mostly vehicles to magnify elements in the human character, but the ingredients for the conclusion that is offered do not seem to add up on its own terms. The resumption of Satan's activity, the main variable in the circumstances of the narrative, suggests on the contrary that Satan is the *sine qua non* for evil to manifest itself. On these terms it follows that human beings would do fine if only Satan was not part of their environment.

Yet others hold that the purpose of the binding and release of Satan is to demonstrate the absolute sovereignty of God, a graphic lesson that nothing can stand against the divine will. On this note Steven Thompson writes that

the main intent of this description of the arrest, binding, and incarceration of Satan is to assert God's sovereignty even over Satan, chief instigator of evil.

³³ Boring, *Revelation*, 209-10.

³⁴ Talbert, *Apocalypse*, 95.

Even the abyss, the realm of evil spirits and fallen angels, is fully subject to the divine will. There is no supernatural being in charge of the abyss who can challenge the angels of God who open and close the abyss, and God alone decides who should be incarcerated there and sets the term of their sentence.³⁵

Sovereignty is also the bottom line in the dispensationalist interpretation of MacLeod. Departing somewhat from the emphasis on the inscrutable element in the divine will,³⁶ MacLeod reads the passage as support for the twin doctrines of divine sovereignty and human depravity, emphatically driven home one last time after the millennial bliss during which Satan is incarcerated. "Just as he was allowed to enter Eden, so in the restoration of paradise – the millennial earth – he will be permitted to do it again. This final chapter in the world's history will again demonstrate that people perpetually embrace evil unless sustained by sovereign grace."³⁷ This conclusion may be true, but it does not follow from the evidence presented any more than Talbert's claim that the Indian summer of the millennium highlights the radical nature of evil in the human heart. Instead, Satan stands out as the critical variable on the terms of these interpretations; all appears well as long as he is at held at bay.

The suggestions and reflections noted above are all conditioned by surface ingredients in the narrative, allowing evocative imagery like *seizing*, *binding*, *throwing*, *locking*, and *sealing* to guide the imagination. They also take for granted that the text should be read as it stands, and they accept the premise that there is a point to the narrative. The author has not lost interest in his story, nor is he merely tracing the outline of a standardized sequence of end-time events from a sense of obligation. Indeed, there is no reason to suspect that the author is less careful or less

³⁵ Thompson, "End of Satan," 265.

³⁶ MacLeod, "Third 'Last Thing'," 483.

³⁷ MacLeod, "The Fifth 'Last Thing': The Release of Satan and Man's Final Rebellion (Rev. 20:7-10)," *BSac* 157 (2000), 205; cf. idem, "Third 'Last Thing'," 477.

purposeful in this part of the narrative than in any other part of his meticulous composition.³⁸

Nevertheless, the explanations offered above seem inadequate for the admittedly difficult questions they are supposed to clarify. Depersonalizing Satan in order to make sense of the narrative appears odd in terms of the underlying worldview of the author and doubly anomalous since the evidence of the text seems to underline precisely the personal nature of the agent that is said to occupy centre stage. Assertion of divine sovereignty is an explanation that does not need to water down its respective characters, but sovereignty is hardly the answer for which the questioner is hoping or led to expect. Sovereignty may be construed to fit the evidence of the *binding* of Satan, but can it also account for his subsequent *release*? This element in the story screams for another rationale. On the whole, sovereignty is often raised as the signal to end all probing and the answer before which all questioning must cease. While sovereignty holds more prestige in theology than it does in human affairs, where transparency and accountability are the accepted standards of legitimate authority, this explanation should not be accepted out of hand. On the terms of the Book of Revelation it should be accepted only if it can be established persuasively that such assertion of sovereignty constitutes a remedy that is equal to the problem which the binding and release of Satan is called upon to rectify.

Satan as an Important Character in the Narrative

In the present context it is not the intention to pursue a full-scale interpretation of the meaning of the binding and release of Satan in the narrative of Revelation.³⁹ The

³⁸ Revelation 20 is a careful and intelligible composition, thus Ekkehardt Müller, "Microstructural Analysis of Revelation 20," *AUSS* 37 (1999), 227-55.

³⁹ The most sustained exegetical study of the millennium is probably J. Webb Mealy, *After the Thousand Years: Resurrection and Judgment in Revelation 20* (JSNTSup 70; Sheffield: JSOT Press,

purpose here is far more modest and is limited initially to inferences that may be drawn from the evolving story line. Three elements will be emphasised on the basis of how the story develops in Revelation.

1. *The conspicuous binding, thousand-year imprisonment and subsequent release of Satan described toward the end of Revelation (20:1-3; 7-10) establishes Satan as an important character in the narrative and allots to him a central role in the plot of the story on literary and narrative terms alone.* The theological importance of this assertion requires further elaboration, but theology must take its cues from the structure and flow of the narrative.⁴⁰ Satan stands apart as an important character in his own right even as he appears to be subjected to harsh treatment and sees his freedom curtailed. When the narrative gives him a key role at the end (20:7-9), the unfolding story merely magnifies the implication that is embedded in his many titles: He is “the dragon, *that ancient serpent*, who is the Devil and Satan” (20:2). As evil comes to an end, his role corresponds to the part he is assumed to have played from the beginning. There is a comprehensive sweep to the development of the larger narrative, a pointed and purposeful symmetry of agency and causality, and the author of Revelation maintains an insistent focus on this drama until it is brought to a definitive conclusion. Assuming that van Unnik’s interpretation of the instruction to John to write ἃ εἶδες καὶ ἃ εἰσὶν καὶ ἃ μέλλει γενέσθαι μετὰ ταῦτα (1:19), is correct, denoting a disclosure encompassing “the totality of existence in its three

1992). Mealy’s conclusions with regard to the two resurrections depicted in Revelation 20 establish parameters that are basic for the interpretation of the symbolic world of this chapter. At this stage it is not fruitful to explore the merits of premillennial, postmillennial, or amillennial views on the thousand-year period that is mentioned six times within the span of six verses in this chapter (20:2-7).

⁴⁰ Thus, according to I. T. Beckwith (*The Apocalypse of John* [New York: The Macmillan Company, 1919], 744-45), “the agency of Satan in leading this hostile movement of the nations is peculiar to our author. This is in keeping with the greater distinctness given to the personality of Satan in the N.T. generally, and especially in our book.”

aspects of past, present and future,"⁴¹ the ending of the story invests the reader with the means to gain a better grasp of the beginning. As the author pursues the drama to its ultimate conclusion, he is at pains to make the reader cognizant of the respective characters. The issue of the drama has not been elucidated by these observations, but the leading character of one side has been singled out in the narrative so as to leave no doubt as to his significance.⁴² Recalling the three conceptual analogies described in the introduction, the binding and release of Satan makes him more than a magnifying metaphor for human conflict or a device by which to ensure ample literary pyrotechnics to go along with the final blaze of evil in history.

2. Satan is made to stand alone on stage at the end of Revelation's narrative in order to place him in a separate category that is distinct from the human drama.

Even though the present procedure suffers the self-inflicted handicap of attempting to trace the story line from the end, the required missing pieces of information can be readily supplemented from the text leading up to this point. For a large part of the narrative Satan colludes with two other powers, one designated "a beast rising out of the sea" (13:1) and the other a "beast that rose out of the earth" (13:11). This triumvirate, within which Satan is the leading strategist and driving force, is also described elsewhere as the dragon, the beast and the false prophet (16:13), the latter corresponding to the beast rising from the earth.⁴³ At this point it suffices to note that there is a parting of ways within the triumvirate as the conflict draws to its close.

Then I saw the beast and the kings of the earth with their armies gathered to make war against the rider on the horse and against his army. And the

⁴¹ van Unnik, "Formula," 88.

⁴² Clues to the issue that lies at the heart of the conflict must necessarily be sought in the biblical narrative that describes its beginning. Moreover, Barr (*Tales of the End*, 139) suggests – correctly, I believe – that part of the answer to the questions raised by this story is to be found in its Old Testament antecedent in Ezekiel.

⁴³ Many interpreters have noted that this triumvirate takes the force of a counterfeit trinity; e.g. Boring, *Revelation*, 154; Metzger, *Breaking the Code*, 75; Resseguie, *Revelation Unsealed*, 49.

beast was captured, and with it the false prophet who had performed in its presence the signs by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped its image. These two were thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulfur.

Rev 19:19-20

Here the devil is literally in the details. Two of the members of the triumvirate are taken out of action in this description. “*These two*” (οἱ δύο), writes John, “were thrown alive into the lake of fire” (19:20). The third member, designated “the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the Devil and Satan” (20:2) and the more important of the three, is singled out for special attention. The description is remarkable for its profuse visual imagery; Satan is “seized,” “bound,” and thrown into the pit, which in turn is “locked and sealed” (20:2). At a later stage, at least on the literary terms of the narrative, he will join the other members of the triumvirate in the lake of fire (20:10), but the intervening treatment is reserved exclusively for him, investing his character with special significance.

The text is richly allusive, and two of the allusions should be noted. The first is an allusion to the author’s own text, forging a link between the key and the “bottomless pit” (20:1) mentioned here and in an earlier incident in the narrative.

Rev 9:1

Καὶ ὁ πέμπτος ἄγγελος ἐσάλπισεν· καὶ εἶδον ἀστέρα ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ πεπτωκότα εἰς τὴν γῆν, καὶ ἐδόθη αὐτῷ ἡ κλεῖς τοῦ φρέατος τῆς ἀβύσσου

Rev 20:1

Καὶ εἶδον ἄγγελον καταβαίνοντα ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ἔχοντα τὴν κλεῖν τῆς ἀβύσσου

Rev 20:3

καὶ ἔβαλεν αὐτὸν εἰς τὴν ἄβυσσον καὶ ἔκλεισεν...

In the sequence of the seven trumpets at an earlier point in the story, the key to the abyss or “bottomless pit” is put in the hands of the star that has fallen from heaven. In Revelation 20 the key, which unquestionably is the same key, is firmly in

the hand of a heavenly messenger sent on a different mission.⁴⁴ In the former incident, the fallen star uses the key to unlock the abyss, spreading darkness on the earth (9:2). In Revelation 20 the abyss in view is indubitably the same abyss that is mentioned earlier, but it is now locked with the key and sealed, curtailing the activity of the exceptional prisoner now trapped behind the figurative bars. On the basis of the prior glimpses of his sordid activity, it is hardly a bold hypothesis to suggest that the fallen star that once possessed the key to the abyss is now the prisoner securely locked within it!⁴⁵

The second allusion in the passage conflates two Old Testament texts that sound the same theme.⁴⁶

Rev 20:3

καὶ ἔβαλεν αὐτὸν εἰς τὴν ἄβυσσον καὶ ἔκλεισεν καὶ ἐσφράγισεν ἐπάνω αὐτοῦ

“and threw him into the pit, and locked and sealed it over him”

Isa 14:15

אֶל-שְׁאוֹל תּוֹרָד אֶל-יַרְפְּתֵי-בּוֹר

“But you are brought down to Sheol, to the depths of the Pit.”

Isa 24:22

וְאֶסְפוּ אֶסְפָּה אֶסִּיר עַל-בּוֹר

“They will be gathered together like prisoners in a pit...”

Here the verbal parallel must be established on the basis of the Hebrew text, noting that the Septuagint uses a different word in each of these instances for the translation of בּוֹר. The “pit” or “abyss” is the most striking common denominator. In

⁴⁴ Cf. Kraft, *Offenbarung*, 255; Thompson, *Revelation*, 177.

⁴⁵ Grant R. Osborne (*Revelation* [BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002], 699) argues correctly that ‘stars’ here refer to angels. On that basis he sees the star in Rev 9:1 as an angel, but this insight does not make the fallen star of 9:1 into the angel with the key in 20:1. Even if ‘falling’ and ‘descending’ lie within the same *semantic* field, the *connotation* and identity of the fallen star in Rev 9:1 and the descending angel in 20:1 could hardly be further apart.

⁴⁶ Cf. Mealy, *Thousand Years*, 129.

Isaiah 14:15 the fallen ruler is even brought down to the ‘extreme parts of the pit,’ corresponding well to the translation “*bottomless* pit” in Revelation. In Isaiah 24:21-22 the theme is God calling “the host of heaven and the kings of the earth” to account, gathering them together “like prisoners in a pit; they will be shut up in a prison, and after many days they will be punished.” The parallel to the thousand-year confinement of Satan in Revelation is remarkable for the notion of imprisonment culminating in a final day of accountability.

But the difference is equally noteworthy. In Isaiah 24:21-22 “the host of heaven and the kings of the earth” are treated on equal terms. In Revelation Satan is pointedly set apart; he alone is seized, bound and locked up. On this point Isaiah 14:15 offers background that corresponds better with the narrative in Revelation. The main subject in Isaiah’s description comes to naught in the extreme parts of the abyss, but the author goes out of his way to emphasise that his demise stands apart from that of everyone else (Isa 14:15-20). A second argument for seeing a predominant influence of the passage describing the fall of the “Day Star, Son of Dawn” or *hélél ben šahar*, derives from the identity of the main subject in the passage (Isa 14:12). As will be argued later in greater detail, Revelation takes the story of the fall of the brightest star in Isaiah as its Old Testament background for the fallen star that was given the key to the abyss at the blowing of the fifth trumpet (9:1).⁴⁷ At the end of Revelation’s retelling of this drama, corresponding with the beginning of the thousand-year period, the key to the abyss has shifted hands, and the illustrious

⁴⁷ In a helpful essay on the various narrative strands in Revelation, M. Eugene Boring (“Narrative Christology in the Apocalypse,” *CBQ* 54 [1992], 720, note 20) objects to the notion of the fall, prehistorical or otherwise, on the grounds that it is not “spelled out” and is not “an explicit event” in Revelation’s presupposed story. But these are exceedingly weak criticisms given that it is not the author’s style to spell things out or to make things explicit in the sense that this criticism expects. Revelation tells its story allusively in the framework of the New Testament worldview – within which less needs to be said about the origin and reality of personal evil than the modern interpreter requires.

prisoner within its walls can be none other than "Lucifer, son of the morning" (Isa 14:12, NKJV). Venturing a preliminary conjecture as to why Revelation sets this character on a different track, the reason is in part that his Old Testament sources already had done it, and more significantly, because Satan is a character of a different order.

Returning to the more modest aim for pointing out this feature in the narrative, however, is the observation that in the end, when the two other members of the false trinity have vanished from view, Satan is left on stage alone. This feature warrants the conclusion that the story accords to him exceptional significance and therefore special treatment. The picture emerging of the losing protagonist in the cosmic battle corresponds to another of the conceptual models mentioned in the introduction. Satan has his story, too. He was once known under another name. If black is his colour and darkness his element in Revelation, there was a time when he was not dressed in black.

3. *Satan's chief characteristic is that of being a deceiver, and the essence of his role in the plot is missed unless it is recognized that he has something to say.* Part of the evidence for this assertion lies on the surface and is readily seen. Satan is imprisoned "so that he would *deceive* the nations no more" (20:3), and when he is released, he "will come out to *deceive* the nations" (20:8). When Satan at last is destroyed, Revelation identifies him as "the devil who had *deceived* them" (20:10).

But this recognition is only the tip of the iceberg. More important evidence for the assertion that Satan has something to say needs the allusion to the story of the temptation and fall in Genesis in order for its full impact in the narrative of Revelation to be felt. The occasion in the Garden of Eden is recalled by the designation of Satan

as ὁ ὄφις ὁ ἀρχαῖος (20:2),⁴⁸ and the essential nature of what transpired is brought to the fore in the ensuing confrontation in Genesis.

And the Lord God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" The woman said, "*The serpent deceived me, and I ate*" (Gen 3:13; NKJV).

The sticking point is evident in the sparse Hebrew text, הַנָּחָשׁ הַשִּׂיאֲנִי וְאָכַל, and the initial characterization of deceitful activity carries over into Revelation to make "the ancient serpent," Satan, and 'deceiver' preferred descriptions of the same persona. Moreover, given the author's predilection to let the Old Testament provide the substrate of his terminology and message, there need be no hesitation to assume that Revelation's crowning piece of evidence for Satan's deceptive activity derives from the story in the Garden of Eden.⁴⁹

On this issue the present interpretation sees a fork in the road, but it is a fork that can only be imagined since most interpreters proceed as though the road does not divide and therefore as if there is no more than one option available to the interpreter.⁵⁰ Interpreters uniformly see Satan as a deceiver, but the nature of his deceit is generally sought on the surface of Roman imperial society rather than in the deeper layers of the biblical narrative. Pursuit of the scriptural substratum behind Revelation is prematurely called to a halt in the belief that all that is useful for interpretation has already been extracted from the Old Testament background. The defining deception in Revelation is therefore to be sought primarily by reading it as a

⁴⁸ Thus Kiddle (*Revelation*, 399), "the **serpent** is so called, not – at any rate primarily – because he represents the ancient Chaos, but because he is the seducer (cf. xii.9)."

⁴⁹ To Abir (*Cosmic Conflict*, 108), the designation of the opponent as ὁ πλανῶν "clearly refers to the serpent in Genesis 3, where he deceived Eve, the mother of all living."

⁵⁰ Vögtle ("Der Gott der Apokalypse," 383), as noted, points out that in Revelation God is not the only one at work in this world, but the implication of this insight is not pursued.

political allegory or as political satire featuring the excesses of Roman emperors⁵¹ and the allure of the Roman priesthood.⁵²

If, on the other hand, Farrer's perception of John's inspiration is called to mind, seeing as he does a man bent over his task by "intense and systematic meditation on the whole prophetic tradition,"⁵³ the defining deception in the cosmic battle in Revelation may instead be found in the Old Testament and only secondarily in later historical manifestations. Within this revised frame of reference the deception brought to view is of a different order. The prophetic meditation begins in Genesis and the Garden of Eden, perhaps even earlier. If it includes the Roman Empire of John's day, it does not begin there, and the threat of imperial persecution is not the outer limit of the prophetic vision.⁵⁴ The meditation is sensitive to content and is intent on making the reader a partner and participant in the reflection. The ancient serpent in this scenario is described as "more subtle" (KJV), "more crafty" (NRSV),

⁵¹ Discussing the seven heads of the beast in Rev 13:1-3 and 17:3, 9, 10. A. J. P. Garrow (*Revelation* [London: Routledge, 1997], 87) concludes that "Nero's head is the definitive locus of the beast," a view shared with minor variations by most interpreters that tends to make Nero into the defining deception of Revelation. Resseguie (*Revelation Unsealed*, 56), on the other hand, sees Nero as a woefully inadequate opponent on the terms of Revelation's imagery.

⁵² Cf. Schüssler Fiorenza, *Revelation*, 75; Yarbro Collins, *Crisis & Catharsis*, 121. Whether the Roman cult and priesthood could have the status and function ascribed to the lamb-like beast in Revelation (13:11ff.) in historical terms seems questionable even when granting the documented symbiotic relationship between the imperial power and the imperial cult in Asia minor (see Appendix I).

⁵³ Farrer, *Revelation*, 4. Bauckham's claim (*Revelation*, 146) that "no other biblical book gathers up so comprehensively the whole biblical tradition in its direction towards the eschatological future" does not stand far from Farrer's view on this point. On the other hand, Schüssler Fiorenza (*Revelation*, 136) takes the position that "the author of Rev. is not bent on the exposition and explication of the OT as authoritative Scripture. It is not the OT prophets, but his own historical-theological situation, which is the locus of revelation." These views represent distinct 'camps' among scholars as to John's use of the Old Testament with far-reaching consequences for interpretation. Giving primacy to the Old Testament background loses nothing in terms of shedding light on the author's situation, in fact, it merely casts a wider net in order to put historical realities in the proper perspective. The view that prioritizes contemporary realities over the scriptural background lacks the wider frame of reference and the corresponding depth of field. Its main flaw, however, lies in the handling of the textual evidence. Ultimately, John's extensive and complex use of the Old Testament mandates the conclusion that the biblical narrative profoundly conditions his story.

⁵⁴ Bauckham (*Revelation*, 152), who affirms the application of the message of Revelation to the situation of its first readers, nevertheless notes that the message transcends the immediate situation.

or “more cunning” (NKJV) than any other creature (Gen 3:1). Something subversive is said on this occasion that answers to the billing of this creature’s designation. What is said is believed and acted upon. In the present interpretation the charge brought against God in the Garden of Eden lies within the purview of the story line that forms the ending of Revelation. Here the third conceptual analogy mentioned in the introduction comes into view. Satan should not be seen as a banal character, and Revelation’s notion of evil does not lie on the level of banality as if the character representing evil goes through the prescribed motions on the basis of a shallow and predictable script. In fact, the mystifying binding and release of Satan in Revelation 20 may yet become comprehensible in the light of the character described as “the ancient serpent” and a plot reconstructed to give him a role that corresponds to his subtlety.

Conclusion

Characteristic elements in the story line that is picked up toward the end of Revelation, then, contends for the significance of Satan above other characters on the losing side of the drama. It sees Satan as a being set apart from the human order, and it defines him more in terms of the subtle insinuation attributed to him in Genesis (3:1) than in terms of obvious evil deeds, including the evil deeds of the Roman Empire. These three elements are constituted here as the strands with which Revelation weaves a compelling theodicy. The suggestion that “Revelation is overwhelmingly concerned with the *truth* of God”⁵⁵ is not diminished by allowing the charges that were brought against God at the beginning of the biblical narrative to

⁵⁵ Bauckham, *Revelation*, 160.

delineate the truth with which Revelation is concerned, especially when the author introduces this account into his plot and larger story line.

The perspective outlined above must be seen as preliminary. It is next to be explored and developed more fully by moving upstream in the narrative to Revelation 12, the structural pivot point, and narratively at the very least 'the beginning of the ending' of Revelation.

CHAPTER FOUR

DISCERNING THE STORY LINE FROM THE MIDDLE: SETTING AND SEQUENCE

Introduction

Taking Revelation 12 as the middle of the book is not to be understood as though this chapter is the halfway point in the story in a chronological sense. Revelation does not tell its story in a linear mode from end to finish.¹ Nevertheless, this chapter furnishes a promising point at which to assess the story line that has been laid out so far on the way to establishing the story line of the entire book.

First, the present chapter reiterates the central role often assigned to this section. Second, I will seek to discern the theme of Revelation 12, particularly by looking at the close relationship between Revelation 12, the presumed 'middle' of the story, and Revelation 20 with its description of the ending. Third, while it is widely agreed that Revelation 12 has three clearly defined sections (vv. 1-6; vv. 7-12; vv. 13-17), it is not clear to what extent narrative progression reflects the chronological sequences in the story. Temporal relationships and meaning are closely related, and it is crucial to locate the beginning in the story. For this reason it is necessary to address whether the war in heaven (12:7-12) comes before or after the birth of the male child (12:1-16), or has some other relationship to this critical event in the book. It is also important to take a preliminary look at Old Testament antecedents to the symbols used in Revelation 12 even though this will be dealt with more thoroughly in the next chapter.

The Pivotal Role of Revelation 12

¹ Boxall, *Revelation*, 10.

As noted already, Revelation 12 has been singled out as the central chapter on structural and thematic grounds.² Already Wilhelm Bousset called Revelation 12-14 “the pinnacle of the apocalyptic prophecy,” stressing that the σημεῖα described (12:1, 3) are signs of a particular and exceptional order.³ Roloff writes that “a large caesura lies between 11:19 and 12:1.”⁴ The likelihood that Revelation has a chiasmic structure that puts the “war of the ages” at the centre of the chiasm sets this section apart as the one that gives perspective to the entire narrative.⁵ Quite apart from judgments with respect to chiasmic structure, there is broad support for dividing the main body of the book (4:1-22:5) into two parts, with the second part beginning at Revelation 12.⁶ Seeing with Bauckham “a fresh beginning”⁷ and even “an uncharacteristically abrupt fresh start”⁸ with chapter 12, the groundwork is in place for taking this chapter as a critical point of the narrative. If the evidence is not yet in place to see Revelation 12 as the pivotal

² Preoccupation with Revelation 12 was particularly acute in the early part of the twentieth century, so much so that in 1925 Ernst Lohmeyer (“Das zwölfte Kapitel der Offenbarung Johannis,” *Theologische Blätter* 4 [1925], 285) could write that “in den letzten drei Jahrzeiten neutestamentlicher Wissenschaft ist kaum ein Kapitel des Neuen Testaments so vielzeitig durchforscht und seiner Bedeutung und Stellung nach so heiss umstritten worden wie das 12. Kapitel der Offenbarung Johannis.” Numerous scholars attribute a pivotal role to Revelation 12; cf. Gunkel, *Schöpfung und Chaos*, 174ff.; Prigent, *Apocalypse 12*; Gollinger, “Das ‘grosse Zeichen’: Offb. 12 – das Zentrale Kapitel der Offenbarung des Johannes;” idem, *Das ‘grosse Zeichen’*; Yarbrow Collins, *Combat Myth*; André Feuillet, “Le chapitre XII de l’Apocalypse: Son caractère synthétique et sa richesse doctrinale,” *EV* 49 (1978) 674-83; Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 15; Fekkes, *Isaiah in Revelation*, 177; Abir, *Cosmic Conflict*, 58; Kalms, *Sturz des Gottesfeindes*, 17-18.

³ Bousset, *Offenbarung*, 335.

⁴ Roloff, *Revelation*, 139. Yarbrow Collins (*Combat Myth*, 157) states likewise that “11:19 thus marks an ending and 12:1 a beginning,” indeed, “the opening of the second great half of the body of the work.”

⁵ Schüssler Fiorenza (*Revelation*, 175-76) proposes a chiasm that covers Rev 10:1-15:4 while Beale (*Revelation*, 131) limits the centre of the chiasm to Rev 11:19-14:20. Beale’s proposed chiasm conforms nicely to other breaks in the narrative. Aune (*Revelation 1-5*, c-cv) disavows a chiasmic structure for Rev 4:1-22:9, dividing this body into seven unequal portions. Whether by accident or design the portion occupying the centre of this division covers Rev 11:15-16:21.

⁶ Cf. Lambrecht, “Structuration,” 103; Schüssler Fiorenza, *Vision*, 33; Beale, *Revelation*, 127-28.

⁷ Roloff, *Revelation*, 139.

⁸ Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 15.

chapter of the entire book, it should at least be seen as marking the beginning of the ending, chapters 12-20 constituting an *inclusio*. The validity of the key role assigned to this chapter by many interpreters is strengthened by the explicit heralding of the theme that is steadily maintained through the remainder of the book, by considering closely the scope of its own narrative, and by the allusions in this chapter to the Old Testament.

Discerning the Theme in Chapter 12

For the present purpose it is not enough to show that chapter 12 marks a new start in Revelation's narrative. It must also be demonstrated that this chapter supports the story line that has been proposed on the basis of chapter 20. This is, to be sure, one of the easier tasks in deciphering Revelation. Yarbrow Collins identifies chapter 12 as the structural midpoint that "makes explicit for the first time that the combat myth is the conceptual framework which underlies the book as a whole."⁹ If the events described in chapter 20 marks the conclusion of the cosmic conflict, chapter 12 pictures the conflict at what is clearly an earlier point in time.

Rev 12:7.9

Καὶ ἐγένετο πόλεμος ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ, ὁ Μιχαὴλ καὶ οἱ ἄγγελοι αὐτοῦ τοῦ πολεμῆσαι μετὰ τοῦ δράκοντος....καὶ ἐβλήθη ὁ δράκων ὁ μέγας, ὁ ὄφις ὁ ἀρχαῖος, ὁ καλούμενος Διάβολος καὶ ὁ Σατανᾶς, ὁ πλανῶν τὴν οἰκουμένην ὅλην, ἐβλήθη εἰς τὴν γῆν

Rev 20:1.2

Καὶ εἶδον ἄγγελον καταβαίνοντα ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ἔχοντα τὴν κλεῖν τῆς ἀβύσσου καὶ ἄλυσιν μεγάλην ἐπὶ τὴν χεῖρα αὐτοῦ. καὶ ἐκράτησεν τὸν δράκοντα, ὁ ὄφις ὁ ἀρχαῖος, ὃς ἐστὶν Διάβολος καὶ ὁ Σατανᾶς, καὶ ἔδησεν αὐτὸν χίλια ἔτη

As these texts show, the author is careful to make the connection between ὁ ὄφις ὁ ἀρχαῖος that comes to view in chapter 12 and the eclipse of this same figure in chapter 20. The same four designations of the non-human antagonist are repeated in the

⁹ Yarbrow Collins, *Combat Myth*, 231. Abir (*Cosmic Conflict*, 45-47) disputes Yarbrow Collins' contention that the theme of cosmic conflict pervades the entire book, yet his own evidence, as perceived by this reader, fits her claim well.

same order in both instances.¹⁰ The author even ignores rules of grammar and syntax, holding to the nominative for ὁ ὄφις ὁ ἀρχαῖος when the accusative for this term in Revelation 20:2 would have been appropriate. There is little doubt that the repetition aims at preventing confusion as to the identity of the character described in the narrative.¹¹ If chapter 12 marks a new beginning, chapter 20 serves as the second boundary marker for the story that is told in the intervening chapters, and the pointed and repetitive designation of one of the contestants in the battle serves as an indicator of the story that is told and as anchoring points for the story line.

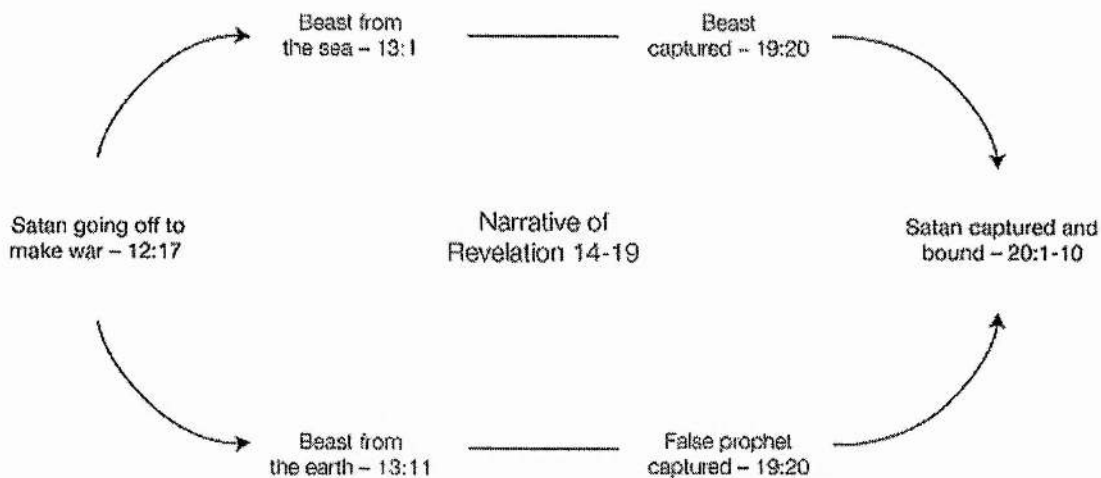
Attempts to downplay chronological progression in Revelation 12-20 in favour of a theology of attribution is achieved only at the expense of discounting many of the elements that point to an evolving story.¹² Attention to these details will lead to the opposite result, and it also opens to view a preliminary glimpse of the author's field of vision. In chapter 12 Satan is expelled from heaven to earth (12:7-9), there to implement his deceptive design (12:17), while in chapter 20 Satan is confined to the abyss (20:2). In chapter 13 Satan executes his design through his two earthly surrogates (13:1, 11), but in chapter 20 he stands alone, his two representatives already consigned to oblivion (19:20). In addition to the inadequacy of merely emphasizing attribution on literary terms, there is the weighty objection that although the story heralds Satan's defeat (12:7-9), it also provides a framework for understanding his ongoing activity

¹⁰ Cf. Kraft, *Offenbarung*, 255-56; William Shea, "The Parallel Literary Structure of Revelation 12 and 20," *AUSS* 23 (1985), 45. Shea's observation is made for chapter 20 with reference to chapter 12, but the connection stands regardless of the angle from which it is viewed.

¹¹ There is a 'Johannine' flavour to this narrative technique, seen notably in the care that is taken to ensure the proper identification of 'the beloved disciple' in the Gospel of John, the last mention recapitulating the first (John 13:23; 21:20).

¹² Cf. Cuvillier, "Apocalypse 20," 346-47.

(12:13, 17).¹³ The outline of this part of the story may be schematized by the following illustration:



The symmetry in the story is unmistakable, indicating progression beginning with Satan and manifesting itself in history through his earthly representatives, then ‘regression’ as the human representatives are exposed and annihilated, and finally ending with the demise of the satanic instigator. This representation sketches in broad strokes the story line of Revelation 12-20. For this section the eclipse of Satan in chapter 20 may be seen as the boundary line of the intervening narrative.¹⁴

But this conclusion must quickly be modified by the admission that chapter 20 clearly does *not* conclude John’s account. After the final removal of Satan from the scene of action Revelation describes a sequence of events that may aptly be described as ‘Paradise restored’ (Rev 21-22), that is, the story does not end with the binding of Satan but with the restoration of Paradise.¹⁵ There is a new heaven and a new earth (21:1), the curse is removed (22:3), access to the tree of life is reinstated (22:2), and

¹³ Rowland (*Revelation*, 103) makes room for historical progression in the narrative, asserting that “[i]t is important that we do not assume that triumph in the heavenly battle is focussed solely on the cross.” Beale (*Revelation*, 680) points to ongoing satanic activity; “though the devil has been defeated, he can still oppress the saints.”

¹⁴ Prigent, *L’Apocalypse*, 301; cf. also Mealy, *Thousand Years*, 97-100.

¹⁵ Thus Metzger (*Breaking the Code*, 103), “Paradise lost is now paradise regained.”

sorrow, pain and death itself will be no more (21:4). The story contains the most far-reaching and suggestive descriptions of alienation overcome. The dwelling of God is again with human beings (21:3). No temple is necessary to facilitate humanity's access to God. The highest point of human experience in this Paradise regained is undoubtedly the statement, "They shall see his face, and his name shall be on their foreheads" (22:4).¹⁶

This description achieves its designated proportion only when the beginning of the biblical narrative is taken into account. In clearer and more explicit terms than any other New Testament writer the reference point for John's vision of the end is derived from the Genesis story of the beginning, juxtaposing the two almost as mirror images.¹⁷ In Genesis human perception of God changed (Gen 3:1-6); God's presence ceased to be desirable, even evoking fear (Gen 3:8-10); human life fell under a curse (Gen 3:17-18); access to the tree of life was denied (Gen 3:22-24); and death was ultimately to cut short human existence (Gen 3:19). John tells the *end* of this story himself, but the Genesis account of the beginning is implicit in his own narrative and must be seen as the undeclared boundary marker at the opposite end.¹⁸

Genesis 3

God portrayed as arbitrary (3:1)
 God's presence evoking fear (3:8)
 Curse on the earth (3:17)
 Cut off from tree of life (3:24)
 Returned to dust (3:19)

Revelation 21-22

Glory of God restored (21:23)
 Seeing God's face without fear (22:4)
 No more curse (22:3)
 Access to tree of life (22:2)
 No more death (21:4)

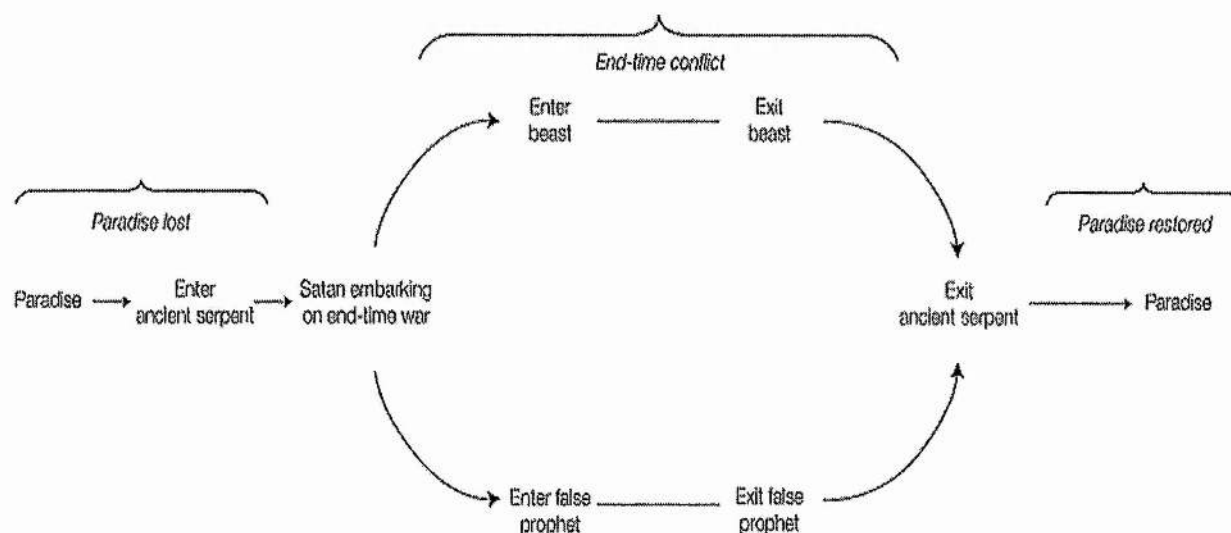
In fact, the author's closing chapters set the boundary marker for the implied

¹⁶ Bauckham (*Revelation*, 142) writes succinctly that "nothing expresses this immediacy more evocatively than the words 'they shall see his face' (22:4)."

¹⁷ Jacques Ellul (*Apocalypse: The Book of Revelation* [trans. George W. Schreiner; New York: The Seabury Press, 1977], 221-22) shows that Revelation's view of the end is not an exact mirror image of the beginning because it features a city, the New Jerusalem, but the tenor of bringing back what was lost in Genesis is nevertheless pervasive.

¹⁸ Beale, *Revelation*, 1040.

beginning of his narrative just as emphatically as that of the end. In this sense the narrative of Revelation does not begin at Patmos; the symmetry at its outer edges is Paradise lost and Paradise restored.¹⁹ The illustration of Revelation's larger story line in chapters 12-22 must therefore be adjusted:



What is proposed here should not be seen merely as the frame of the emerging picture. The so-called ‘boundary markers’ are also part of the picture, and they condition how the rest of the picture is perceived. Seeing the Garden of Eden to the far left of the picture and Paradise restored to the far right, as it were, Revelation lays out the framework within which the intervening narrative belongs and must be understood. Specifically, the vivid and evocative portrayal of healing and restoration in Revelation 21-22 can only be appreciated in the light of what went wrong according to the Genesis narrative. What went wrong is highlighted further by the attention given to “the ancient serpent” whose career and programme come to an inglorious end in Revelation 20:1-10. The thematic coherence that is evident in chapters 12-20, sharply focused on the role of “the ancient serpent,” is itself grounded in the Genesis narrative of the fall, but this premise is hugely magnified when this narrative spills over into the two closing

¹⁹ Metzger, *Breaking the Code*, 103.

chapters of Revelation. These chapters depend on the Genesis account, and they corroborate the comprehensive sweep of Revelation's message that was announced at the beginning of the book (1:19).²⁰

Specifically, the book's promise at the beginning and at the end to disclose ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι ἐν τάχει (1:1; 22:6) must be qualified by the wider-ranging offer to reveal ἃ εἶδες καὶ ἃ εἰσὶν καὶ ἃ μέλλει γενέσθαι μετὰ ταῦτα (1:19).²¹ The suspense attaching to the revelation of "what must soon take place" (1:1; 22:6), then, is inextricably linked to the recollection and retelling of the greater narrative (1:19), and it is in the light of this extended account that the things yet to take place, indeed, the claim that they *must* take place, is to be understood. The scope of this story takes the reader back to the beginning of the biblical narrative in Genesis with the implication there to locate the plot to be resolved. Moreover, Ernst Käsemann's assertion that "it was apocalyptic which first made historical thinking possible within Christendom"²² may be adopted without reservation in the reading of Revelation since probably no other book in the Bible is so conscious of history or so determined to cover history from beginning to end.

The Narrative Scope and Sequence in Chapter 12

The content of chapter 12 enhances this construct of Revelation's greater narrative. To begin with, Revelation 12 gives "the ancient serpent" a central role in all three phases of its account (vv.1-6; vv. 7-12; vv. 13-17) on the order outlined for the story line in

²⁰ Cf. van Unnik, "Formula," 88.

²¹ Garrow's repeated and well-taken point (cf. *Revelation*, 14, 28, 63, 80, 118, 124-25) that Revelation intends to show the reader "what must soon take place" (1:1; 22:6) is seriously compromised by the failure to include the wider qualifying phrase in 1:19.

²² Käsemann, *New Testament Questions*, 96; see also Koch, *Apocalyptic*, 76.

Revelation 12-20. Second, this chapter brings into play crucial elements of the Genesis story of the fall quite apart from the use of the same account in the description of Paradise restored (Rev 12:1-2; chs. 21-22). Third, while not breaking strictly into categories of past, present and future, the three sections into which the chapter naturally divides nevertheless have a comprehensive scope that compasses what went before, what is, and what is to come. Arranging the three sections of chapter 12 according to a narrative sequence of beginning, middle, and ending advises the following order: (1) the war in heaven describes the beginning (12:7-12); (2) the birth of the male child constitutes the decisive middle (12:1-5); (3) the persecution of “the rest of her children” comprises the conclusion (12:13-17).²³ It is necessary to qualify this arrangement by noting significant thematic overlap between the three sections.²⁴ The case for the proposed order and the import of the overlapping elements are best appreciated by looking systematically at each of the three sections of Revelation 12 in the order of their sequence in the narrative.

1. The Pregnant Woman Giving Birth to Male Child (12:1-6)

Several general concerns have been raised that still influence current interpretation of Revelation 12. Hermann Gunkel insisted that no one could legitimately read the story of the birth and ascension of the male child as an allegory about Jesus since the main

²³ According to Rev 12:17, Satan’s last resort is to go forth to make war μετὰ τῶν λοιπῶν τοῦ σπέρματος αὐτῆς, translated variously as “the remnant of her seed” (KJV), “the rest of her children” (NRSV), or “the rest of her offspring” (NKJV). The imagery of Genesis 3:15 lingers over this expression in the promise of enmity between the serpent and the woman’s seed, τοῦ σπέρματος αὐτῆς (LXX).

²⁴ As noted, the three tableaux in Revelation 12 are distinct, yet they overlap, presuppose each other, and shed light on each other. In v. 4 the primordial fall from heaven of the dragon and his angels is hinted even though the main focus is on the birth of the male child. In v. 6, after successfully delivering her child, the woman flees into the wilderness, previewing the events covered in the third tableau in vv. 13-17. In the second tableau (12:7-12), the war in heaven described in v. 7 is primordial in origin, but the decisive victory celebrated in vv. 10-12 has the triumph of the male child in the first tableau as its source of inspiration.

ingredients in the story in his view originated in extra-biblical myth, and salient features of Jesus' life are missing.²⁵ Adopting a literalistic reading of the narrative, Gunkel claimed that supposed references to Jesus in Revelation 12 "in no way fit the historical Jesus."²⁶ The Jesus of history was born in Bethlehem, not in heaven, as Gunkel's reading of Revelation was made to imply. Moreover, Jesus was not snatched away to the throne of God as a mere infant.²⁷ Still more lethal to the notion that Jesus should be seen as an original character in the narrative were the glaring omissions. Nothing, Gunkel objected, is said of Jesus' earthly life, of his teaching, his ministry, and of his death on the cross.²⁸ On the basis of his reading of the text the original referents in the story were alien to anything related to the life of Jesus, and Gunkel professed to be at a complete loss to explain how anyone had come to see him as a leading character in the account.²⁹

Proponents of alternative views should not be intimidated by such rhetoric. As already noted, the quest for the traditions underlying the narrative in Revelation 12, of which Gunkel's is the seminal work, is grounded in a literalistic reading that appears exaggerated and contrived. It attributes a degree of naïveté to the author that falls far below the sophistication of his composition, and it underestimates the seamless unity of the book on the supposition that the author has awkwardly introduced material derived from other contexts. On both counts Gunkel's view caricatures a text that is pervasively and consistently allusive. Indeed, when he faults Revelation's narrative for leading the reader to believe – according to his spin on the text – that Jesus was born in

²⁵ Gunkel, *Schöpfung und Chaos*, 174-81.

²⁶ Gunkel, *Schöpfung und Chaos*, 175.

²⁷ Gunkel, *Schöpfung und Chaos*, 174-75.

²⁸ Gunkel, *Schöpfung und Chaos*, 175-76, 180.

²⁹ Gunkel, *Schöpfung und Chaos*, 180-81.

heaven rather than in Bethlehem, or that the omission of the thirty years of earthly biography leaves a story that cannot point to Jesus, there is hardly need of a further corrective than to point to the allusive attributes of the text.

Additional important constraints nevertheless apply to the history of religions approach to this theme. Gunkel claimed to have the means with which to determine from where the combat material originated.³⁰ This contention is more easily made than demonstrated. Common patterns may exist in the ancient world, but there is hardly a straight line from the pantheon of Babylonian myth to the characters involved in the cosmic combat of Revelation. Still more precarious, however, is the disposition to invest the alleged mythological material with explanatory power that overshadows the immediate literary context.³¹ Even if it were possible to establish a story's derivation from other sources with certainty, it does not follow that meaning is determined by what is designated as the 'original' source.³²

This is an injunction that applies with particular force to the interpretation of Revelation. The recipients of the message were established churches in Asia Minor (Rev 1:4) that had come into existence through the ministry of first generation Christians in the first century. It is unlikely that the new revelation introduced any novel themes or characters to them, and certainly not anything that needed an excursion

³⁰ Gunkel (*Schöpfung und Chaos*, 385-92) identified the dragon with the Babylonian Tiamat, the male child as the young God Marduk, the father as Ea and the mother as the goddess Damkina.

³¹ Kalms (*Sturz des Gottesfeindes*, 3) admits that the history of traditions approach holds the danger of offering a compilation of apparent parallels as a substitute for an exposition of the text.

³² Mythological derivation is analogous to interpretations that are based on etymological inferences. Just as James Barr (*The Semantics of Biblical Language* [London: Oxford University Press, 1961], 187) has shown of words that "extant forms are not derived directly from the ultimate etymology or from the 'root meaning,'" stories may conform even less to the tidy evolutionary trajectory sometimes assumed in 'history of tradition' constructs. See also, idem, "Semantics and Biblical Theology – A Contribution to the Discussion" (VTSup 22; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1972), 17.

into pagan mythology in order to become comprehensible.³³ The prior narrative concerning Jesus had already crystallized and defined the main characters in the story on terms unique to its own perception of the plot.³⁴ The weight of evidence therefore favours Hildegard Gollinger's conclusion concerning the framework within which the message of Revelation in general and chapter 12 in particular must be understood.

If the Apocalyptist had a pagan myth as his model for the portrayal of "the great sign" in Rev 12, then it is possible, though not proved, that he has "Christianized" this myth. He has given it a completely different character, has changed the sequence, in short: he has made the myth serviceable and fitted it into his overall work in such a way that it no longer stands apart from the other chapters. A myth that has been transformed in this original manner is no longer a myth, but belongs to the assimilated arsenal of Christian proclamation. All the symbols of Rev 12 are just as well understood in the light of the Old Testament, Jewish literature, and, above all, Jewish apocalyptic. In the light of the strong adherence of apocalyptic to tradition that is widely acknowledged, adoption of Jewish sources is no doubt more likely than pagan (trans. mine).³⁵

³³ A modified cosmic dualism is pervasive in the gospel narratives, most emphatic in the temptation stories in the Synoptic Gospels (Matt 4:1-11; Mark 1:12.13; Luke 4:1-13), and in the passion account of the Gospel of John (12:23-32); cf. Sigve Tonstad, "The Father of Lies, 'the Mother of Lies,' and the Death of Jesus (John 12:20-33)," paper presented at the St. Andrews Conference on the Gospel of John and Christian Theology, July 2, 2003.

³⁴ Yarbro Collins' (*Combat Myth*) thorough analysis of Revelation 12 and its background continues the tradition inaugurated by Gunkel, but it is in important respects a more circumspect work. On the positive side, she (1) does not make the mistake of simplistically caricaturing the allegory by closing her eyes to the allusive character of the text; (2) produces fuller accounts of the myths alleged to lie behind the combat narrative in Revelation 12, giving the reader an opportunity to assess the evidence (pp. 57-85); (3) is sensitive to the Old Testament background for the combat theme even though she projects priority for the extra-biblical myths thought to underlie this theme; (4) argues convincingly for the central role of the theme of cosmic combat for the understanding of Revelation, and especially for chapter 12 as a key to the book (pp. 157-90). On the less convincing side, she (1) does not give sufficient weight to the literary sophistication intrinsic to a text so pervasively allusive as is Revelation. (2) Her search for parallels, even when it operates with an eclectic free hand, seeks only to account for the similarities and not for the differences, leaving a hypothesis that allows little room for the possibility of falsification. For instance, having concluded that Revelation is at least partly "an adaptation of the myth of the birth of Apollo" to Leto in Greek mythology (p. 67), the myth shows Python ('the dragon') intent on killing the mother Leto, not the son as in Revelation, and the mother gives birth to two children, Apollo and Artemis, not just a single male child. These differences are great enough to cast doubt on the relationship. (3) She pays insufficient attention to the unified biblical narrative that is woven into Revelation's story. Aune (*Revelation 6-16*, 671-72) points out additional discrepancies, such as the woman's flight into the wilderness and the dragon's continuing pursuit of the woman *after* her child has been taken away to heaven. On traditional historical terms these features are evidence that the author hardly used a single or coherent pagan myth. Aune adapts the history of traditions premise to include a greater and more eclectic pastiche of traditions, a weak solution as hypotheses go, and weaker still in view of the biblical narrative at hand.

³⁵ Gollinger, *Das "grosse Zeichen,"* 126. Roland Bergmeier ("Altes und Neues zur 'Sonnenfrau am Himmel [Apk 12]': Religionsgeschichtliche und quellenkritische Beobachtungen zu Apk 12 1-17," *ZNW* 73 [1982], 97-108) finds Gollinger in grave error on grounds already familiar since Gunkel: The

Gollinger's assertion that the story in Revelation 12 is more than a "Christianized" pagan myth speaks to a Christian context within which even the nimbus of myth lifts from the story. What belongs to "the assimilated arsenal of Christian proclamation"³⁶ in the form of a narrative featuring a cosmic struggle between fallen and unfallen angels (12:4, 7-9) and a God-like person incarnated in human flesh (12:2, 5) is in this context told and perceived as the story of real beings. The characters on both sides of the combat emerge from the mist of mythology into the realm of history.³⁷ Revelation's description of the end of this drama (20:1-10) does not leave the reader with the task of merely making conjectures with regard to the beginning of the story. The beginning is also narrated, most clearly in the crucial anchoring of the story line that carries through from chapter 12 till the end of the book.

Probing for Old Testament background for the story of the birth of the male child in Revelation 12 produces significant yield. Sweet argues that Genesis 3:15-20 "dominates this chapter."³⁸ Paul S. Minear supports the view that the story told in Revelation 12 to a large extent is predicated on the Genesis account of the fall.³⁹ The conflict between the serpent and the woman's seed begins with the announcement in Genesis:

absence of explicit references pointing to the Messiah is the great stumbling block. Again, the premise of this criticism is a literalistic reading that ignores the allusive quality of the narrative.

³⁶ Gollinger, *Das "grosse Zeichen,"* 126.

³⁷ This is the gist of Origen's answer to the middle Platonist Celsus' criticism of the Christian belief in the reality of personal evil (Satan). Celsus acknowledges that pagan mythology also had stories of cosmic combat, but he asserts that they are substantially different from the Christian account in content and have no explanatory power. Origen (*Contra Celsum* 6.42-6.43) replies that the myths, however vague and devoid of moral content, speaks to the reality of the cosmic and suprahuman dimension of evil, an area of common ground shared with Christianity, asserting at the same time that one only gets to the heart of the matter in the Christian version.

³⁸ Sweet, *Revelation*, 203.

³⁹ Paul S. Minear, "Far as the Curse Is Found: The Point of Revelation 12:15-16," *NovT* 33 (1991), 71-77.

The Lord God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, cursed are you among all animals and among all wild creatures; upon your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. *I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will strike your head, and you will strike his heel.*"

Gen 3:14-15

Interpreters may not agree whether the declaration in Genesis was *intended* by its author as a gospel announcement in embryonic form,⁴⁰ but there is no doubt that the author of Revelation takes the Genesis statement as his point of departure and describes its fulfilment.⁴¹ Revelation continues the story begun in Genesis with the aim of weaving a seamless cloth. Thematic parallels are evident; the characters in Genesis are the serpent, the woman, and the woman's seed (Gen 3:14-16), appearing only slightly modified as the woman, the *ancient* serpent, and the male child in Revelation 12.⁴² The plot announced in Genesis remains on track in Revelation as the enmity between the serpent and the woman (and her seed) rages unabated, signified in Revelation by the dragon seeking an occasion to pre-emptively murder his future vanquisher (12:4). Given the influence of the Genesis narrative on the ending of the story in Revelation, Genesis stands out as the source for the background and story line that is told here in

⁴⁰ Thus, S. R. Driver (*The Book of Genesis* [London: Methuen & Co., 1904], 48) notes that Gen 3:15 long has been known as the *Protevangelium* and that the designation is deserved, but he cautions against reading too much into it. Johann Michl ("Der Weibessame [Gen 3,15] in spätjüdischer und frühgeschichtlicher Auffassung," *Bib* 33 [1952], 371-401) argues unconvincingly against traces of Gen 3:15 in Revelation 12, claiming that a Christological interpretation was a later development, whereas R. A. Martin ("The Earliest Messianic Interpretation of Genesis 3:15," *JBL* 84 [1965], 425-27) holds that the Messianic interpretation was a reality by the 3rd or 2nd century B.C.

⁴¹ Gunkel's dismissive treatment of the birth narrative in Revelation is not shared by André Feuillet ("Le Messie et sa Mère d'après le chapitre XII de l'Apocalypse," *RB* 66 [1959], 56-57), who sees no conflict between the great portent *in heaven* and the birth of the messianic child *on earth*. In his later essay, "Le chapitre XII de l'Apocalypse," Feuillet accepts the Genesis imagery of Revelation 12 as a matter of course, taking Gen 3:15 as perhaps the most portentous statement in the entire Old Testament (p 682). Beckwith (*Apocalypse*, 6) is not alone in his assertion that the serpent of the narrative in Genesis "is not the Satan of the later Scriptures," but his conviction in this respect hardly reflects the view of John. "The ancient serpent" in Revelation is insistently and categorically "the devil and Satan" (12:9; 20:2).

⁴² Charles Hauret ("Ève transfigure. De la Genèse à l'Apocalypse," *RHPR* 59 [1979], 328-29) points to Genesis 3 for the identity of the protagonists and the origin of the conflict pictured in Revelation 12. Fekkes (*Isaiah in Revelation*, 179, n. 16) sees the connection to Gen 3 "in *characters* (woman, serpent, seed), and *context* (pain in childbirth and the origin of hostility towards the saints)."

Revelation 12.⁴³ The allusion rises to crescendo volume when the moment arrives for the woman to give birth.

Genesis 3:16

To the woman he said, "I will greatly increase your pangs in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children..."

Revelation 12:2

She was pregnant and was crying out in birth pangs, in the agony of giving birth.

It is clear, then, that Satan plays an important role in the narrative in this first section of Revelation 12 (12:1-6), a role that corresponds to his significance in the rest of the book.⁴⁴ The birth of the male child is set in the context of cosmic combat because of Revelation's reading of the narrative of the Old Testament. The brief mention of the child "who is to rule the nations with a rod of iron" points to his victory and vindication (12:5).⁴⁵ It underestimates the care of the author and the unity of his book to suppose that this brief glimpse of Jesus misses the part concerning his suffering and death, all of which belong to the message of victory that ultimately rests on his shoulders.⁴⁶

2. The Cosmic War (12:7-12)

While the demise of Satan (20:1-10) marks the conclusion of the conflict, and while the designation of this being as "the ancient serpent" (12:9; 20:2) incorporates the Genesis

⁴³ Feuillet, "Le Messie," 56; idem., "Le chapitre XII," 675. The case for the influence of other texts is tenuous. Fekkes (*Isaiah in Revelation*, 179-81) shows that the role of Isa 7:14 is at most tangential. The verbal parallels between Isa 26:17 and Rev 12:2 are striking (p. 181-83), but the theme has another trajectory, and the contribution of this text to the message of Rev 12:1-6 can at best be one of contrast. When the woman in Isaiah's prophecy cries out in agony of childbirth, there is only wind to show for the effort (Isa 26:17-18). Remarkably, Ian Paul ("Old Testament in Revelation 12," 263-65, 275) ignores Genesis 3 entirely, takes the influence of Isa 7:14 to be slight if any at all, and attributes great significance to Isa 26:17 and 66:7. These texts are thematically inferior to Gen 3:15 when the subject matter in Gen 3:15 is compared to Rev 12:1-6, notably by the absence of the opponent in Isa 66:6-14.

⁴⁴ F.-M. Braun, "La femme et le dragon," *BVC* 7 (1954), 64.

⁴⁵ Interpreters are agreed that Ps 2:7-9 lies behind Rev 12:5; cf. Rowland, *Revelation*, 103; Beale, *Revelation*, 639-40; Paul, "Old Testament in Revelation 12," 266.

⁴⁶ Feuillet, "Le chapitre XII," 678.

account of the fall into the range of its comprehensive narrative, the description of the war in Revelation 12:7-9 brings the cosmic scope of the conflict into full view.⁴⁷ It is a primary objective here to establish or clarify the chronological perspective for this passage and to assess the merits for assigning *sequential* primacy to it. This will be done by looking at literary aspects of the composition, by examining the logic of the narrative, by exploring the Old Testament background for the combat theme featured in this passage, and finally by reassessing the sharpened thrust of the Genesis fall narrative in the passage in the light of what is found.

i. Narrative and Chronology

It must first be noted that in Revelation narrative flow and chronological development of the subject matter do not always go hand in hand. Reading the narrative of chapter 12 as though the three distinct tableaux are arranged in a straightforward chronological sequence gives the following implausible story: The dragon, “that ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan” (12:9), first tries to destroy the male child on earth (12:4). Failing that (12:5), he goes to war *in heaven* (12:7), determined to achieve there what he failed to accomplish under circumstances more favourable to him in the earthly setting.⁴⁸ Failing in this arena, too (12:8), he is relegated to the earth for good (12:9). On earth he proceeds to pursue “the woman who

⁴⁷ Josef Hammer’s proposition (*Die Geheime Offenbarung: Ein Schicksalsbuch der Engel und Menschen* [Stuttgart: Verlag Katolisches Bibelwerk, 1958], 97) that “now we hear for the first time in the Holy Scriptures the original story [Urgeschichte] of Satan and his fall” claims more on behalf of Rev 12:7-9 than is warranted, especially in view of the fact that the combat theme has several Old Testament antecedents, but the key role of this text within Revelation’s narrative remains. Peter Busch (*Der gefallene Drache: Mythenexegese am Beispiel von Apokalypse 12* [TANZ 19; Tübingen: A. Francke Verlag, 1996], 118) agrees that the Genesis narrative of the Fall is incorporated into the multiple designations of the opponent. To Abir (*Cosmic Conflict*, 107), the designation of Satan as ὁ ὄφις ὁ ἀρχαῖος signifies that that “the original and eschatological opponent” meet in the same character.

⁴⁸ For Swete (*Apocalypse*, 152-53), “the birth and rapture of the Woman’s Son issue in a war which invades the ἐπουράνια,” with no reference to the original rebellion. Metzger (*Breaking the Code*, 74) indicates that anger at earthly defeat incites Satan to initiate a battle in heaven. Mounce (*Revelation*, 240) sees this battle as “the cosmic prelude to the consummation.”

had given birth to the male child" (12:13), infuriated by prior defeat and by the realization that "his time is short" (12:12).

The weaknesses of this construct are several and considerable, beginning with the assumption that chronological progression is indicated by the literary sequence. On this point Lohmeyer finds the second tableau in the series "distinctly raised from the rest by virtue of its content."⁴⁹ Roloff likewise spots a break beginning with 12:7, asserting that "the course of the narrative is interrupted here in a way that appears to be most ungrounded."⁵⁰ Aune acknowledges that the war-in-heaven theme of the second tableau has been seen as "an intrusive narrative fragment,"⁵¹ and Barr expansively takes the appearance of this theme as an example of "John's penchant for inserting a short scene that summarizes the action of major sections of the book."⁵² These observations indicate that the logic of the narrative does not flow in a tidy chronological sequence on its surface but must instead be sought in the deeper thematic unity that underlies the whole composition.⁵³

A second failing in equating narrative sequence with chronological evolution lies in the suggestion that Satan, having been defeated in his design on the earthly Christ (12:5), nevertheless does not hesitate to take on the exalted Christ in the heavenly realm. The corrective to this supposition emerges from the logic of the story itself.⁵⁴ When the first tableau reveals that "the child was snatched away and taken to God and

⁴⁹ Lohmeyer, *Offenbarung*, 100.

⁵⁰ Roloff, *Revelation*, 148.

⁵¹ Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 691.

⁵² Barr, *Tales of the End*, 124.

⁵³ On this point Barr (*Tales of the End*, 124) observes that "although it reports the war as that primeval battle of the distant past in which one of God's heavenly courtiers rebelled, the victory is clearly the future victory of the messiah (12:10)."

⁵⁴ Metzger, *Breaking the Code*, 74.

to his throne" (12:5), the statement already connotes definitive victory for Christ and defeat for his foe. Removing the child "to God and to his throne" therefore signifies more than a narrow escape, to be followed by future peril for the child, or by the prospect of victory for his antagonist. For Satan at this point to extend the battle to the heavenly realm seems improbable and farfetched even granting the inscrutability and desperation of the satanic mind. Instead, it is more natural to see this as a distinct tableau in the composite narrative and thus to locate the description of the cosmic combat (12:7) prior to the earthly events and to interpret the defeat of Satan as a curtailment of his influence and activity as a consequence of the earthly events.⁵⁵

Once it is realised that the author makes theology take precedence over chronology and therefore does not lay out his story according to a strict linear or chronological pattern, the breaks, flashbacks, and temporal conflations in the narrative cease to be confusing. The *eschatological* setting in Revelation does not negate the primordial origin of the combat described;⁵⁶ indeed, primordial origin is the inescapable premise of the narrative.⁵⁷ The recognized practice of Revelation to 'telescope' certain events⁵⁸ or to describe events kaleidoscopically⁵⁹ helps clarify chronology, and the subject matter of the account is thereby allowed to arrange incidents in a way that preserves the linear progression of beginning, middle, and ending that belongs to virtually any story. On literary terms the war in heaven (12:7) follows the depiction of

⁵⁵ Bousset (*Offenbarung*, 341) and Charles (*Revelation* I, 323) document the widely held notion in late Palestinian Judaism that the primordial fall of Satan did not bar him completely from the heavenly council. The basis for this view will be elaborated below.

⁵⁶ Foerster, "Die Bilder in Offenbarung," 285.

⁵⁷ Braun, "La femme et le dragon," 67-68.

⁵⁸ Beale (*Revelation*, 639) aptly calls the sometimes complex chronological sequence of events as "temporal telescoping." Osborne (*Revelation*, 469) applies the same insight and terminology to the events described in Revelation 12.

⁵⁹ Boxall (*Revelation*, 8, 68) refers to the fluid boundaries between visions and sequences as a kaleidoscopic narrative.

the birth of the male child (12:1-6), but the conflict does not begin with the birth of the child. Satan's role on earth as the deadly adversary of the woman and her child is predicated on the prior movement from heaven to earth involving him and his fallen cohort of angels.⁶⁰ This, to be sure, is already specified in the first tableau by noting that "his tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth" (12:4). The descent from heaven to earth, if not a 'fall' from heaven to earth, denotes an earlier stage in the adversarial relationship and constitutes the precondition for the battle playing out on the earthly stage.⁶¹ When the war in heaven is described explicitly in the second tableau (12:7), it extends, reinforces, and deepens the perspective already implied in the first scene (12:1-6). In this way historical sequence and narrative progression are preserved even if the narrative does not evolve in a linear mode.

ii. Temporal Relationships and Meaning

The temporal aspect in narratives is a crucial determinant for interpretation since it is from the beginning of the story that the rest of the narrative develops and derives its meaning, presenting the characters and laying out the plot that is to be told and resolved. In this narrative the subject matter points to Revelation 12:7 for the beginning of the drama, signifying a heavenly origin for the conflict and earth as the secondary location. While it is possible to picture Satan suddenly coming on stage from nowhere to coincide with the birth of the male child, this possibility fails on the terms of Revelation's narrative and still more on the terms supplied by Genesis for Revelation's story line. Satan is 'fallen' in some sense of the word before he emerges as the ancient

⁶⁰ When Paul ("Old Testament in Revelation 12," 267) treats the fall of Satan from heaven to earth as redundant detail of "cosmic geography," it is partly because 'Satan' is seen as a metaphor and not as a character that has a story and a significant role in the narrative. The eschatological judgment that is in view does not negate the primordial fall on which the judgment is predicated.

⁶¹ Aune (*Revelation 6-16*, 695) shows that Satan's expulsion from heaven in Jewish sources is thought of as a primordial event.

serpent and the deceiver. It falls to the child yet to be born to strike the head of the serpent in the Genesis narrative, and to the serpent to strike the woman's heel (Gen 3:15). The serpent is addressed as a significant character in the Genesis account (Gen 3:14),⁶² and his significance remains undiminished as the moment arrives for the woman to give birth in Revelation (12:4).

The spatial perspective correlates with the temporal priority of the event that is described. Spatially, the movement goes from heaven to earth, and the identification of the dragon as "the ancient serpent" (12:9) points to the heavenly origin of the agent of the temptation in Genesis. Temporally, the transformation of this heavenly being into "the devil and Satan" comes before the temptation recorded in Genesis (Gen 3:1 ff.). It is significant that in the first tableau the dragon is said to be the active agent causing the downfall of "the stars of heaven" (12:4). When the theme of cosmic war becomes explicit in the second tableau (12:7-9), the dragon "was thrown down" by the heavenly sovereign along with his angels (12:9). The change in voice from active to passive requires little variance in the wording, but the difference is sufficient to safeguard the impression that the leader of these angels initiated the conflict and is the cause of his own downfall.

καὶ ἡ οὐρὰ αὐτοῦ σύρει τὸ τρίτον τῶν ἀστέρων τοῦ οὐρανοῦ
καὶ ἔβαλεν αὐτοὺς εἰς τὴν γῆν (12:4).

καὶ ἐβλήθη ὁ δράκων ὁ μέγας,
ὁ ὄφις ὁ ἀρχαῖος, ὁ καλούμενος Διάβολος καὶ ὁ Σατανᾶς,
ὁ πλανῶν τὴν οἰκουμένην ὅλην,
ἐβλήθη εἰς τὴν γῆν,
καὶ οἱ ἄγγελοι αὐτοῦ μετ' αὐτοῦ ἐβλήθησαν (12:9).⁶³

⁶² "The Lord God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this..." (Gen 3:14).

⁶³ Prigent (*Apocalypse 12*, 146) notes the triple ἐβλήθη as the key expression in 12:9, but the aorist active form in 12:4, casting the dragon as the cause of the downfall should also be noted. Significantly, Prigent sees parallel passages in Phil 2:5-11; 1 Cor 2:6-8; and Col 1:20; 2:15.

Important nuances must be added to this exposition, particularly as to the meaning of Satan being “thrown out” from heaven, but the narrative in Revelation 12 points to a cosmic conflict that began in heaven before embroiling the earth. Essential to this unveiling is the discovery that the earthly conflict cannot be described or understood in human terms alone.

iii. Locating the Beginning

A nuanced reading of Revelation 12:7 prioritizes this text as the first glimpse of the cosmic combat that lies behind the rest of the narrative.

Καὶ ἐγένετο πόλεμος ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ, ὁ Μιχαὴλ καὶ οἱ ἄγγελοι αὐτοῦ τοῦ πολεμῆσαι μετὰ τοῦ δράκοντος. καὶ ὁ δράκων ἐπολέμησεν καὶ οἱ ἄγγελοι αὐτοῦ... (12:7).

Charles’ careful analysis and translation of this text has withstood the test of time.⁶⁴ The crucial point relates to the phrase ὁ Μιχαὴλ καὶ οἱ ἄγγελοι αὐτοῦ τοῦ πολεμῆσαι μετὰ τοῦ δράκοντος. The nominatives ὁ Μιχαὴλ καὶ οἱ ἄγγελοι αὐτοῦ before the articular aorist infinitive τοῦ πολεμῆσαι are uncharacteristic and wooden Greek,⁶⁵ leading Charles to call this expression “a literal Greek reproduction of a pure Hebraism.”⁶⁶ τοῦ πολεμῆσαι should in his view be understood as a forthright translation of the infinitive construct מִלְחָמָה with a causative meaning.⁶⁷ Retroverting

⁶⁴ Charles, *Revelation*, I, 321-22; James H. Moulton and Wilbert F. Howard, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek* (4 vols; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1928; repr. 1979), II:448-49, 484-85; F. Blass and A. Debrunner, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament* (trans. and rev. by Robert W. Funk; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961), 207; Nigel Turner, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek. J. H. Moulton* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1963), III:141; idem., *A Grammar of New Testament Greek* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1976), IV:152; Mussies, *Morphology*, 96.

⁶⁵ Turner (*New Testament Greek*, III:141) notes that putting the subjects in the nominative before the infinitive construction “is not Greek at all.”

⁶⁶ Charles, *Revelation*, I, 322.

⁶⁷ Funk’s revision of Blass and Debrunner (*Greek Grammar*, 207) and Turner (*New Testament Greek*, 141) refer to this construction as a “the Semitic imperative” הַ with the infinitive. This understanding supports the *must* of the action in view.

the verse into Hebrew and subsequently translating from Hebrew to English, Charles brings a degree of precision to the text that lies many notches above less circumspect attempts.

And war burst forth in heaven:
Michael and his angels had to fight with the Dragon...⁶⁸

This bolder wording, indicating that "Michael and his angels *had to* fight," is not content merely to inform that a conflict arose in heaven.⁶⁹ It assigns blame to one of the parties, laying the responsibility squarely on Satan.⁷⁰ The notion that "war burst forth" as well as the necessity of the action taken in the heavenly realm oblige temporal primacy for this verse. A sudden emergency appears to have arisen in heaven to which Michael's response became a matter of necessity and with the inference that the opponent's incitement created intolerable conditions in heaven itself. It takes the Old Testament background to justify and substantiate the larger presumption, but the primordial and heavenly origin of the conflict is grounded in the suggestive wording of this text.

iv. Old Testament Antecedents

⁶⁸ Charles, *Revelation*, I, 322. Aune (*Revelation 6-16*, 692) has appropriated this insight in his translation: "Michael and his angels had to fight with the dragon."

⁶⁹ Beale's (*John's Use of the Old Testament*, 334) muted endorsement of Charles' translation says nothing to detract from the idea of necessity in this construction. Indeed, if Rev 12:7 alludes to the Michael figure in Dan 10:20 who "must return מִלְחָמָה" (*BHS*) or "must return τοῦ πολεμῆσαι" (*Th*), Daniel allows a glimpse of a battle already in progress, thereby strengthening the impression that the conflict in Rev 12:7 compasses the primordial beginning.

⁷⁰ Two observations are warranted with respect to Beale's discussion of this passage (*Revelation*, 652-54). On the one hand, Beale prefers Charles' translation that "Michael and his angels had to wage war." On the other hand, he thinks that the war in heaven is unleashed by the events on earth, a view that fails to absorb the primordial aspect of the conflict. The necessity forced upon Michael and his warring angels is in his view not found in the activity of Satan but in the reciprocal relationship between the earthly victory of Jesus and the requirement that this finds a heavenly counterpart or reflection. Osborne (*Revelation*, 469) sees "Michael and his angels" going to war "against the dragon," without any note of what triggered and necessitated the action.

It is so much a compositional premise of Revelation to expect an Old Testament antecedent to the cosmic conflict described in chapter 12 that it would be remarkable if such precursors were nowhere to be found. For that reason alone Fekkes' attempt to discount that the war-in-heaven theme in Revelation alludes to the passage describing the fall of the "Day Star, son of Dawn" in Isaiah (Isa 14:12) deserves critical scrutiny before it is accepted.⁷¹ Fekkes argues that the literary link between the combat theme in Revelation and the passage in Isaiah is so weak as to virtually preclude the case for an allusion.⁷² He also finds the context of the dragon image to be inimical to the notion of a primordial fall from heaven, contending that this notion derives its impetus from developments in Jewish and Christian angelology, and that the interpretation is not attested with certainty until Origen (c. 185-254). As the present interpretation reads the evidence, all of these suggestions are highly contestable.

As noted above, Old Testament allusions are expected in view of Revelation's pervasive use of the Old Testament in all facets of its composition,⁷³ and additionally because the combat theme featured in this text has been identified as the thematic backbone of the entire book.⁷⁴ Removing from consideration the leading candidate text, if not the only one,⁷⁵ should therefore be done with more trepidation than Fekkes'

⁷¹ Fekkes, *Isaiah in Revelation*, 186-89, 280. Fekkes' study is important because it is the only book-length study to date dealing specifically with the use of Isaiah in Revelation. However, as Beale (*Old Testament in Revelation*, 28) has pointed out, the study is flawed by being limited only to previously proposed allusions to Isaiah.

⁷² Cf. Fekkes, *Isaiah in Revelation*, 186. Paul ("Old Testament in Revelation 12," 268) claims similarly that "there is little or no shared vocabulary between the two passages."

⁷³ Quantitative computation of Old Testament allusions must remain tentative. Metzger (*Breaking the Code*, 13) finds 278 of a total of 404 verses in Revelation to contain one or more allusions to the Old Testament.

⁷⁴ Yarbro Collins, *Combat Myth*, 2.

⁷⁵ On the basis of the presence of Michael and the connotation of cosmic conflict Beale (*John's Use of the Old Testament*, 334) sees allusions to Dan 10:20-21 in Rev 12:7. This is appropriate as far as the general theme of cosmic conflict is concerned, but it does not follow that the battle in view in Rev 12:7 converges with the battle described in Daniel.

study reveals. Reluctance in this respect also seems in order since the link between the fallen star in Isaiah and the war-in-heaven theme in Revelation commands the support of an array of scholars.⁷⁶

Second, the verbal link between the war-in-heaven theme in Revelation 12 and the fall of the exceptional star in Isaiah 14 is considerably stronger than Fekkes allows. This holds true even when only a small pilot shaft is dug into the textual mound of Isaiah.

Revelation 12:7a

Καὶ ἐγένετο πόλεμος ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ

Isaiah 14:12a, LXX

πῶς ἐξέπεσεν ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ

Admittedly, at first sight the probe looks unpromising since the explicit verbal parallels in this comparison appear scant. The significant relatedness in terms of the setting *in heaven* seems offset by the apparent absence of other similarities. If this preliminary impression is allowed to be decisive, however, it threatens to obscure the actual and profound broader congruence between the passages. Since the author of Revelation most likely looks to the Hebrew text for the background of his imagery, criteria for accepting verbal parallelism must be sufficiently flexible to include

⁷⁶ Adolph Lods ("La chute des anges," *RHPR* 7 [1927], 295-315) traces the theme of the fall of the angels primarily to *1 Enoch* 10 and *2 Enoch* 29:4-5, but behind these texts he sees the description of the fall of a heavenly being in Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28. K. L. Schmidt ("Lucifer," 161-79) pins down the fall of Lucifer to a single Old Testament source, namely Isaiah 14:12, thoughtfully mobilized in Luke 10:18 for the same theme. Kraft (*Offenbarung*, 167) finds the influence of Isa 14:12 to be widespread, appearing also in Luke 10:18 and John 12:31. Yarbrow Collins (*Combat Myth*, 81-82) endorses the link between Rev 12:7 and Isa 14:12 but prefers direct influences from Greek and possibly Ugaritic mythology on Revelation's combat theme. Roloff (*Revelation*, 142-43) sees the related passage of Ezek 28:11-19 along with Isa 14:12ff. behind Revelation's war-in-heaven theme. Aune (*Revelation 6-16*, 695) takes Isa 14:12-15 to be the Old Testament motif for the expulsion of Satan from heaven. Beale (*Revelation*, 658) posits the fall of Satan and his angels at the beginning of creation with reference to Isa 14:11-16 and Ezek 28:12-19). Barr (*Tales of the End*, 124) takes Isa 14:12 to be in view, locating the rebellion in heaven in the distant past. Osborne (*Revelation*, 469) argues for the primacy of the primordial application. With the notable exception of Schmidt, none of these interpreters pursues this connection as an exegetically significant lead. Abir (*Cosmic Conflict*, 91), Kalms (*Sturz des Gottesfeindes*, 145-49), and Busch (*Der gefallene Drache*, 134) all see a possible role for Isa 14:12-15 behind the combat theme in Revelation 12, but the methodology of these studies do not see John in sustained dialogue with the Old Testament.

conceptual convergence. The notion that the exalted being in Isaiah is fallen (ἐξέπεσεν)⁷⁷ from heaven does not lie far from the Revelation's triple description of Satan being "thrown from heaven" (12:9) since the relationship between πίπτω and βάλλω is very close.⁷⁸

Combat is described explicitly in this opening statement describing the war in heaven in Revelation, but conflict is far from absent in Isaiah. In his encyclopedic commentary on this section of Isaiah, Hans Wildberger notes perceptively the conflict that is understood to lie behind the result of this being's expulsion from heaven. The reader is expected to complete the thought, and the thought conforms to the message of Revelation – "there was war."⁷⁹ The poet's exclamation in the face of the fall of the star is comprehensible only in the light of the conflict preceding the decline in status. As is explicit in the text, heaven is the location of the war. In fact, the subtext of fierce conflict moves into the open with the elaboration that the Day Star is "cut down to the ground" (Isa 14:12). "As the expression נִדְּעָה לְאָרֶץ makes discernible, Helel ben Shahaar must have been involved in a severe struggle," writes Wildberger.⁸⁰ The surface impression of unrelatedness between the narrative in Revelation and the poem in Isaiah is therefore premature and misleading. Καὶ ἐγένετο πόλεμος ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ, John writes in Revelation (12:7a). It is now evident that the passage in Isaiah has the

⁷⁷ Note that the LXX uses the 3. pers. sing. where the Hebrew has 2. pers.

⁷⁸ Looking at the influence of Isa 14:12 on Luke 10:18, Erich Klostermann (*Das Lukasevangelium* [Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1929], 117) contends that Luke's use of "πίπτω may be meant as a passive for βάλλω," creating the picture of Satan "being cast out from heaven." The use of πίπτω to describe the falling or fallen star in connection with the third and fifth trumpets is further evidence of the close connection between πίπτω and βάλλω in the text of Revelation (8:10; 9:1; 12:4, 9).

⁷⁹ Wir "werden ergänzen können: es kam zum Kampf," writes Hans Wildberger (*Jesaja 13-27* [BKAT 10:2; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1978], 550).

⁸⁰ Wildberger's German reads, "Helel ben Schachar muss, wie die Wendung נִדְּעָה לְאָרֶץ erkennen lässt, in einen harten Kampf verwickelt gewesen sein" (*Jesaja 13-27*, 552-53). נִדְּעָה in the Niphal has the connotation of violent severance, "be chopped off," "be hewn off."

same premise and theme, relating it in so many words from the point of view of the outcome, πῶς ἐξέπεσεν ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ (Isa 14:12a, LXX).

Both the immediate and the wider context of each of these passages broaden the basis for this conclusion. The initial locus in both passages is *heaven*. The second and consequent locus is *the earth*.

Rev 12:9c
ἐβλήθη εἰς τὴν γῆν

Isa 14:12b (LXX)
συνετρίβη εἰς τὴν γῆν

In both passages the conflict in heaven leads to the expulsion of one of the protagonists to the earth. However, in neither instance is the earth the final destination of this personage. Revelation traces the fall of Satan from heaven to earth as only one stage in the battle (12:7-9), pursuing a further movement from the earth to the abyss as the conflict moves toward its climax (20:1-3). The same movement in stages from heaven to earth and finally to the subterranean bottomless pit is also central to the story told in Isaiah (Isa 14:12-20). Strands from this poem are in Revelation maintained with a purposeful and sustained attention to the poem's subject matter so as to leave the impression that the author of Revelation is working on the same tapestry, refining its colours and yet respecting the design and story line already in existence.⁸¹

Rev 20:3a
καὶ ἔβαλεν αὐτὸν εἰς τὴν ἄβυσσον

Isa 14:15 (LXX)
νῦν δὲ εἰς ᾧδου καταβήσῃ καὶ εἰς
τὰ θεμέλια τῆς γῆς⁸²

⁸¹ Fekkes (*Isaiah in Revelation*, 188) takes the fact that Satan is not cast into the pit until Rev 20:1-3 to be evidence against allusions to Isaiah 14 in Revelation 12. But the case for arguing precisely the opposite is stronger. In Revelation Satan is thrown to the earth (12:9) and then to the bottomless pit (20:1-3). In Isaiah the Day Star is "cut down to the earth" (14:12) and then "brought down...to the depths of the pit" (14:15). Isaiah's poem affords a bird's eye view of the action told in greater detail in Revelation.

⁸² Here the Hophal הוֹפֵל gives more information than καταβήσῃ in the LXX. The object of the action has been brought down by someone else, "you have been brought down" rather than "you will go down." This element is preserved in Revelation. The question whether the composite expression הוֹפֵל...לְאֵלֵי שְׁאוֹל in Isaiah is adequately accounted for by the expression εἰς τὴν ἄβυσσον rather than by εἰς ᾧδου...εἰς τὰ θεμέλια τῆς γῆς of the LXX must be answered in the affirmative (Rev 9:1, 2, 11; 11:7; 17:8; 20:1, 3). Aune (*Revelation 6-16*, 525-26) observes that a three-level cosmos appears to be in view with the use of the term ἄβυσσος.

Although a note has already been made with respect to the convergence of the verbal action in description of the war in heaven in Revelation and the expulsion of the "Day Star, the Son of Dawn" in Isaiah, this point warrants further sharpening. The war-in-heaven theme lies at the heart of both passages. Wildberger's observation that the language of Isaiah's poem evinces "a severe struggle" is too easily overlooked.⁸³ Similar intensity is conveyed by the portrayal of the struggle in Revelation to the point of intimating that the outcome of the battle was not a foregone conclusion.

And war broke out in heaven;
Michael and his angels had to fight against the dragon.
And the dragon and his angels fought,
but they were not strong enough... (Rev 12:7.8)

In the light of the foregoing, the verbal grounds for denying that Revelation's description of the cosmic conflict alludes to Isaiah's poem must be rejected.⁸⁴ In both cases there are overt verbal parallels of heaven, earth, and the lower reaches of the cosmos. The focus of the verbal action is in both instances a severe conflict climaxing in defeat for one of the parties and victory for the other. The language describing the eviction from heaven is in both passages interrelated and almost identical. In Revelation the story of the battle is told in the third person from the point of view of its beginning.⁸⁵

And war broke out in heaven;
Michael and his angels had to fight against the dragon.
And the dragon and his angels fought,
but they were not strong enough,
and there was no longer place for them in heaven.⁸⁶

⁸³ Wildberger, *Jesaja 13-27*, 552-53.

⁸⁴ *Contra Fekkes (Isaiah in Revelation*, 186, 280) and Paul ("Old Testament in Revelation 12," 268).

⁸⁵ The translation is slightly modified from the NRSV.

The great dragon was thrown down,
that ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan,
the deceiver of the whole world—
he was thrown down to the earth,
and his angels were thrown down with him.
Rev 12:7-9

In Isaiah the battle is described in the more dramatic second person from the point of view of its outcome.

How you are fallen from heaven,
O Day Star, son of Dawn!
How you are cut down to the earth,
you who laid the nations low!
Isa 14:12

Third, the objection that Revelation primarily pictures Satan in his role as the judicial adversary in the heavenly court⁸⁷ casts the net too narrow. Satan is without doubt identified as ὁ κατήγωρ τῶν ἀδελφῶν ἡμῶν (12:10), but the designation of *accuser* must be balanced against the other appellations used. The protagonist described as ὁ κατήγωρ τῶν ἀδελφῶν ἡμῶν (12:10) is also designated ὁ ὄφις ὁ ἀρχαῖος (12:9), and the latter designation, together with the explanation that he is the original deceiver (ὁ πλανῶν τὴν οἰκουμένην ὅλην), is if anything more characteristic of the terminology applied to his persona in Revelation (12:9; 20:3, 8, 10). These designations are welded into one piece, and they resist being divided up or played against each other in a scheme of either-or. Moreover, these titles and descriptions absorb a wide selection of references to Satan in the Old Testament, with priority assigned to the allusion to Genesis.⁸⁸ Not one of them or all of them together

⁸⁶ The possibility that Revelation here alludes to Dan 2:35 or Ps 37:36 or to both heightens the sense of irrevocable finality coming to the instigator of evil; cf. Paul, "Old Testament in Revelation 12," 266-67.

⁸⁷ Cf. Fekkes, *Isaiah in Revelation*, 188.

⁸⁸ In Revelation's view of the biblical narrative Satan appears as "the ancient serpent" in Genesis (3:1), where the gist of his activity is understood to be deception (3:13); under the title of Satan in the

contributes to the case of nullifying the influence of the poem in Isaiah on the war-in-heaven theme in Revelation. On the contrary, much as the link between these passages remains sound, the full range of terms applied to Satan envisions a primordial aspect to the his fall as a basic component in Revelation's view of the biblical narrative.⁸⁹

Fourth, the attribution to Origen of the identification of the Day Star in Isaiah with the fall of Satan lacks nuance.⁹⁰ On the one hand we are dealing with an underexposed and underappreciated aspect of the New Testament, allowing for the impression that later Christian interpreters on this point ventured where their apostolic forbears did not dare to tread.⁹¹ On the other hand, ascription to Origen is made dismissively, on the tacit assumption that this attribution in itself is sufficient to call the interpretation into doubt and deprive it of exegetical credibility. Careful appraisal of this point in Origen's writings is hardly the basis for this denigration because such an assessment will inevitably point beyond Origen.⁹² Since virtually all his extant writings

book of Job (1:6-12; 2:1-7), where he doubles as accuser and destroyer; and under the title of Satan in Zechariah (3:1.2), where he is clearly the accuser in a court-like setting.

⁸⁹ Assigning primacy to the poem in Isa 14:12-20 does not negate other passages that may also be in view. Isa 27:1 portrays God's triumph over "Leviathan, the fleeing *serpent*, Leviathan the twisting *serpent*." In this text the LXX twice combines "serpent" and "dragon" to describe the antagonist that will be overcome; cf. Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 186-95.

⁹⁰ Cf. Fekkes, *Isaiah in Revelation*, 187.

⁹¹ Significant studies specifically addressing the influence of the poem in Isaiah 14:12-15 (20) on New Testament thought nevertheless exists. A selection of such studies ranging from the Synoptics to John to Pauline writings include Susan R. Garrett, *The Demise of the Devil: Magic and the Demonic in Luke's Writings* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989); Judith L. Kovacs, "'Now Shall the Ruler of This World Be Driven out': Jesus' Death as Cosmic Battle in John 12:20-36," *JBL* 114 (1995), 227-47; Gene Miller, "APXONTON TOY AIΩNOΣ TOYTOY – A New Look at 1 Corinthians 2:6-8," *JBL* 91 (1972), 522-8; Judith L. Kovacs, "The Archons, the Spirit and the Death of Christ: Do We Need the Hypothesis of Gnostic Opponents to Explain 1 Cor. 2.6-16?" in *Apocalyptic and the New Testament*, 217-236; Per Bilde, "2 Cor. 4.4: The View of Satan and the Created World in Paul," in *Apocryphon Severini*, presented to Søren Giversen, eds. Per Bilde, Helge Kjær Nielsen, Jørgen Podemann Sørensen (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 1993), 29-41; Clinton E. Arnold, "The 'Exorcism' of Ephesians 6.12 in Recent Research: A Critique of Wesley Carr's View of the Role of Evil Powers in First-Century Belief," *JSNT* 30 (1987), 71-87; Ernst Lohmeyer, *Kyrios Jesus: Eine Untersuchung zu Phil. 2,5-11*, 2nd ed. (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1961); A. Feuillet, "L'hymne christologique de l'Épître aux Philippiens (II, 6-11)," *RB* 72 (1965), 352-380; Maarten J. J. Menken, *2 Thessalonians* (London: Routledge, 1994), esp. 100-13.

recapitulate the fallen adversary's background, as in Origen's most sustained expositions on the subject⁹³ or in the form of scattered mention elsewhere,⁹⁴ exegetical innovation on the part of Origen is unlikely. "He who was Lucifer and who arose in heaven, he who was without sin from the day of his birth and who was among the cherubim, was able to fall with respect to the kindness of the Son of God before he could be bound by chains of love," Origen writes characteristically and unapologetically with no apparent prodding from the text in a comment on Romans 6:8-10, presenting it as a story already well known and accepted.⁹⁵

What has been received in the outlook that expresses itself in this way is not limited to belief in cosmic dualism and personal evil. The outlook is anchored in the biblical narrative, holding up the poem in Isaiah 14 as its chief exhibit. Isaiah's depiction of the fall of "Lucifer, son of the morning" (Isa 14:12, *NKJV*), occupies such a prominent role in Origen's work that a degree of prior consensus on behalf of this reading must be assumed, and the ubiquity of this text in the many references to the origin of evil argues strongly against innovation. The evidence overwhelmingly suggests that Origen is indebted to a theological and exegetical tradition that was established prior to him, and one to which his own work added less than is commonly thought. The fact that Tertullian (c. 145-220), earlier and independently of Origen (c.

⁹² See my essay, "Theodicy and the Theme of Cosmic Conflict in the Early Church," *AUSS* 42 (2004), 169-202.

⁹³ The most sustained treatments are found in *Contra Celsum* 6.42-6.44 and in *First Principles* 1.5.4-1.5.5; II.8.3.

⁹⁴ Cf. Origen, *HomLuke* 31.4-6; *idem.*, *ComJn* 32.302; *idem.*, *HomJer* 27.5; *idem.*, *HomÉzék* 13.1-2.

⁹⁵ Origen, *ComRom* 5.10.16.

207), adduces some of the same Old Testament texts as Origen as evidence for his view of personal evil supports this view.⁹⁶

Other hidden voices can confidently be ruled out. The suspicion of pervasive Platonic influence that clings to Origen's thought does not apply here because there is no equivalent Platonic counterpart to the Christian belief in personal evil.⁹⁷ Although later Platonists try to delineate the origin, nature and reality of evil to make it stand out more distinctly, they do not entertain any notion of a personal agent of evil who fell from a state of innocence.⁹⁸ The same holds true for Philo, to whom Origen is largely indebted for the method of allegorical interpretation of the Old Testament.⁹⁹ In Philo any notion of personal evil is made unthinkable by his tendency to see evil in terms of impersonal abstractions and by his unqualified monotheism.¹⁰⁰ Plato, Philo, Plutarch, and others wrestle with the problem of evil, but there is neither the same explanation nor the same sharp focus as in the Christian account.¹⁰¹ To the extent that these thinkers

⁹⁶ Tertullian, *Against Marcion* 2.10; 5.11. Of even more interest for the study of Revelation is the attribution of the fall of the *Eosphoros* to Origen or even to Irenaeus (c. 182) in the last two of thirty-nine scholia on Revelation that in important respects bear the marks of Origen; cf. Constantin Diobouniotis and Adolf Harnack, *Der Scholien-Kommentar des Origenes zur Apokalypse Johannis* (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1911), 41, 45-46, 62. Whatever the final verdict on the source of the first paragraph of scholion 38, it could be the first preserved Christian application outside the New Testament of the fall of the star in Isa 14:12 to the theme of the war in heaven in Rev 12:7-9.

⁹⁷ One cannot escape the impression that for Plato evil is a property of matter, an unruly negative principle, and for that reason Plato is at pains to absolve God of direct responsibility for bringing the physical world into existence; cf. Plato, *Timaeus* (trans. Desmond Lee; London: Penguin Books, 1977), 97.

⁹⁸ Plutarch (c. 45-125) and Numenius of Apamea (c. 150) transformed the negative unruly principle of Plato's *Timaeus* into an active force, a 'Maleficent Soul'. But this force is seen to pre-exist and lie outside God's ordering activity, and God is unable to overcome it entirely. On the human level evil is still an expression of material reality; cf. John Dillon, *The Middle Platonists. 80 B.C. to A.D. 220* (rev. ed. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), 202-4, 373-74.

⁹⁹ Origen clearly considers Philo to be a trustworthy predecessor in the interpretation of scripture; cf. David T. Runia, *Philo and the Church Fathers* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995), 117-25.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Philo of Alexandria, *On the Creation of the Cosmos according to Moses* (trans. and notes David T. Runia; Leiden: Brill, 2001), 238.

¹⁰¹ The laid-back inquiries of Plato do not convey the seriousness and sense of existential crisis that is intrinsic to the Christian account of evil. Philo and the Middle Platonists also convey a less dramatic understanding, inhabiting as they do a world wherein evil is a constituent of matter.

contribute to Origen's mindset and theology, Origen's interpretation runs against the grain, as an area in his thought that clearly is *not* a spin-off of the Platonic worldview within which he lived and breathed. Finally, while Origen no doubt is capable of originality, his intellectual background points to an earlier Christian source for his understanding of evil.¹⁰²

On the basis of the preceding evidence there is a solid basis for concluding that the war-in-heaven theme in Revelation derives from the poem describing the fall of "the Day Star, the Son of Dawn" in Isaiah (Isa 14:12-20). This perspective modifies the proposed story line in Revelation on two points. Spatially, the new element is the fall from heaven of the protagonist who comes to an end in Revelation. The narrative envisions two aspects to this fall – one involving falling from a state of innocence, the other describing loss of influence. The 'fall from innocence' makes the fallen being into "the deceiver of the whole world" (12:9), but the 'fall from influence' leads to a contraction of Satan's sphere of operation (12:13). If the 'fall from innocence' creates a temporary power base grounded on Satan's power to deceive, the 'fall from influence' signifies the exposure and unravelling of the deception itself. Heaven is the primary locus in both instances because the loss of innocence happens in heaven, and it is heaven that first takes to heart and implements Satan's loss of influence (12:12). Earth is secondary in falling to the deception and last in coming to terms with it; indeed, the joy in heaven at the deceiver's curtailment seems proportional to the distress awaiting the earth in the face of the deceiver's ongoing activity (12:12).

Temporally, the two aspects of the fall of this being places the 'fall from innocence' primordially, prior to the fall of humanity. The 'fall from influence,' on the

¹⁰² Cf. Annewies van den Hoek, "Origen and the Intellectual Heritage of Alexandria: Continuity or Disjunction?" in *Origeniana Quinta* (ed. Robert Daly; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1992), 40-47.

other hand, is in direct consequence of the birth and triumph of the male child featured in the first tableau (12:1-6). The premise of Satan's influence is the 'fall from innocence,' indicated by the assertion that "Michael and his angels had to fight with the dragon" (12:7b), but the rest of the story is told from the point of view of the decisive curtailment of the foe's influence.¹⁰³ This moment is highlighted by the loud voice in heaven proclaiming, "Now has come the salvation..." (12:10). Revelation has already heralded this victory in the scene portraying the Lamb that receives the scroll with the seven seals (5:1-7).¹⁰⁴ To the extent that the loss of Satan's influence predominates, the second tableau (12:7-12) follows the first tableau (12:1-6) temporally as well as narratively. However, this being's loss of innocence is also featured in the second tableau and makes up the premise for the entire narrative and message of Revelation.¹⁰⁵ Since the primordial aspect of the conflict is often downplayed or denied,¹⁰⁶ it must be emphasized by placing the war in heaven in the second tableau chronologically prior to the birth of the male child in the first tableau, noting the areas of overlap and conflation.

3. The Climax of the Conflict (12:13-17)

¹⁰³ Charles (*Revelation I*, 324) notes "that the first and most important stage in the conquest of Satan had already been achieved. His sphere is henceforth more limited." On the same point Beale (*Revelation*, 656) writes that "Christ's death and resurrection have resulted in drastically curtailing the devil's role of deception and nullifying his role of slanderer."

¹⁰⁴ Thus, Bauckham (*Climax of Prophecy*, 186) observes that "the defeat of the Dragon (12:7-9) is doubtless the same event as the victory of the Lamb (5:5-6), and both are to be historically located in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ..." Rowland (*Revelation*, 103) draws the same connection.

¹⁰⁵ Charles (*Revelation I*, 323) reaches a similar conclusion by a different route since Jewish tradition held that "Satan was cast down from heaven in the beginning of time, but according to a widely attested belief he had still access to heaven. The fusion of these two beliefs could readily issue in the eschatological expectation that Satan was to be cast down from heaven in the last times...."

¹⁰⁶ Swete (*Apocalypse*, 153) disputes reference to the original rebellion, acknowledging, however, that Papias seemed to understand it that way. Caird (*Revelation*, 153) makes the sweeping but unwarranted assertion that "the Bible knows nothing of the premundane fall of Satan." Boring (*Revelation*, 166) claims that John has no interest in the origin of Satan, only in his destruction.

The third tableau in Revelation 12 does not present significant difficulties whether in narrative progression or temporal sequence, but it enjoins precautions that are crucial in the present context. The first of these precautions is to ensure that the continuity of the narrative is preserved. From henceforth Satan's activity and influence is confined to the earth (12:13),¹⁰⁷ but it is implicit that his activity continues along the same trajectory that has been established in the two previous tableaux. As time is running out and the demonic stratagem moves forward with increased ferocity (12:12), the nature and objective of the satanic subversion can do no more than bring the original programme to final fruition. What interpretation brings out of Revelation's portrayal of the climax of the conflict in the third tableau (12:13-17) and in the expansion of this tableau in the following chapters (13-20), will therefore hinge on what it has brought into the story up to this point. For this reason the premise of continuity constrains the interpreter to ascertain with utmost vigilance the nature of what is continued.

Continuity as such is embedded in the text. Having introduced the woman about to give birth to a male child in the first tableau (12:1, 5), the author writes that the dragon ἐδίωξεν τὴν γυναῖκα ἣτις ἔτεκεν τὸν ἄρσενά (12:13), supplying a double corroboration of her identity.¹⁰⁸ As the woman is figuratively airlifted to safety in the desert ἀπὸ προσώπου τοῦ ὄφεως (12:14), the designation of her pursuer as the serpent is a second textual and thematic marker of continuity. Again, it is ὁ ὄφις that "throws" a river after the woman in order to sweep her away (12:15). Finally, described in language that evokes Satan's determination to prevail over the woman by more subtle means, he "goes away" to ποιῆσαι πόλεμον μετὰ τῶν λοιπῶν τοῦ σπέρματος αὐτῆς

¹⁰⁷ Lohmeyer (*Offenbarung*, 101) brings the pertinent reminder that the narrative pictures Satan's ongoing activity and not its final eclipse. Liberation of heaven is ensured, but the earth is still under the sway of the oppressor.

¹⁰⁸ The article is used anaphorically with reference to the woman (no article in 12:1) and the child (no article in 12:5a); cf. Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 704.

(12:17). This terminology signals continuity on at least two levels. The circle is closed in that the being who originally instigated πόλεμος ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ (12:7), proceeds to ποιῆσαι πόλεμον in the end-time on earth (12:17). The Genesis story of the fall remains in view as in the first tableau since the object of the foe's ire is "the rest of her seed" (cf. Gen 3:15).

Remaining Issues: Characters and Plot

The present interpretation admits that conspicuous deficiencies remain in the explication of the story that is told in the three tableaux in Revelation 12 so as to preclude any conclusion at this point. Until now the focus has mostly been on the physical parameters of the story, the 'places and things.' It has established that preceding the conflict on earth there was war in heaven (12:7). It is also evident that the outcome of the conflict is determined in favour of the good by the birth and triumph of the male child on earth (12:1-6), leading to curtailment of Satan's influence in heaven (12:9). Moreover, the crucial methodological decision to treat a poem describing war in heaven in Isaiah (Isa 14:12-20) and the Genesis account of the fall (Gen 3:1-24) as integral to Revelation's narrative have contributed significantly to bringing the interpretation to the present point.

That something is lacking is nevertheless quite obvious. Little has been said about the characters in the conflict and even less has surfaced regarding the plot – whether from the point of view of literary narrative¹⁰⁹ or on terms appropriate to

¹⁰⁹ 'Character' and 'plot' are key terms used in narrative analysis. Resseguie (*Revelation Unsealed*, 19-27) sees in Revelation lifelike or *round* characters (e.g. Jesus), flat characters (e.g. the writer, the woman clothed with the sun), and stock characters (e.g. Satan, Michael). As pointed out with regard to the binding and release of Satan (20:1-10), the treatment of Satan as a mere stock character seems sorely inadequate. On the subject of plot, he asks the key question, "What issues are at stake?" (p 24) But his answer indicates that the real plot of Revelation falls outside his narrative scope. His construct of the story line pictures a tranquil, stable heavenly world over which God is serenely in control, contrasting this sharply to earthly turmoil. Revelation, however, lays out a plot that begins with conflict in heaven (12:7).

biblical exegesis.¹¹⁰ Who, indeed, are the contestants in this drama, described in Revelation as ὁ Μιχαὴλ καὶ οἱ ἄγγελοι αὐτοῦ on the one hand and as ὁ δράκων... καὶ οἱ ἄγγελοι αὐτοῦ on the other (12:7)? This question seeks further clarification with regard to the leading characters in the narrative. What did he want, the one who instigated the conflict? This question probes for the plot, the basic premise that drives the story. To leave these substantive parameters so poorly defined would be an intolerable omission in ordinary narratives. Here it is risky, too, since the right stance in the face of the end-time events described in the third tableau depends on grasping the evolving plot from its inception, and it is unsatisfactory since the agonizing and exceptional birth of the male child in the first tableau successfully exposes the deceiver.

Getting beyond this apparent impasse, however, demands a fresh appraisal of the available resources, asking whether the means to get any further really exist. Must one be content to leave the characters indistinct and the plot simplistic because the means by which to define both in greater depth is already exhausted? This possibility is certainly implicit in the lack of interest in at least one of the characters in the conflict. It is also strengthened by the assumption that the Old Testament contributes little to the development of the plot in Revelation,¹¹¹ and this deterrent with respect to the plot has been voiced explicitly. Ian Paul writes that “many of the allusions to the Old Testament function in such a way as to identify the characters rather than describe the action of the plot.”¹¹²

¹¹⁰ Bauckham (*Climax of Prophecy*, 174) finds study of Revelation’s images impeded “by too hasty acquiescence in the assumption that they are of a piece with the imagery of the apocalyptic writings in general.”

¹¹¹ Beale (*Revelation*, 656, 659) is a notable exception to the general neglect of the Old Testament on this point. In discussing the influence of Genesis 3 on Revelation 12, he notes that Satan is represented as *slanderer* and *deceiver* to the point of charging that “God’s own character was corrupt” (p. 659). This suggestion certainly sets up a formidable plot. Unfortunately, Beale does too little to integrate this insight into his own exposition of the plot in Revelation.

¹¹² Paul, “Old Testament in Revelation 12,” 269.

Pursuit of greater clarity with regard to plot – and also with regard to the characters in the narrative – therefore proceeds against significant odds. In the present interpretation progression from here takes as its premise that the Old Testament provides Revelation with sufficient material to shed further light on the characters in the narrative than is generally granted and more than simply to identify the characters. With regard to plot it takes the opposite position to the one stated above: *It is precisely the action of the plot that is developed and illuminated by the Old Testament passages in question.* This conviction derives in part from prior assumptions with regard to the nature of John's meditation on the Old Testament as described earlier,¹¹³ but it also heeds closely the passages harnessed by John. These passages are hardly devoid of plot. Whether in the poem in Isaiah or in the account of the fall in Genesis, the passages bristle with verbal elements that are decisive for the plot within the immediate context. When allusions to these passages appear in Revelation, one should be reluctant to embrace the idea that they have shed their most vital constituent: the plot. Instead, assessing Revelation's sophisticated and sustained use of the Old Testament, it is specifically the plot in these passages that commands attention. The enormity of the subversion they propose and the appearance of an underdeveloped plot in Revelation combine to invite closer scrutiny of the neglected action within the Old Testament passages in question. This means that the entire passage to which Revelation alludes must be allowed to speak.¹¹⁴ For the interpretation of Revelation to go the second mile in this respect is indispensable even if it seems like one has to begin all over again.

¹¹³ Cf. Farrer, *Revelation*, 23-29.

¹¹⁴ Cf. Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, xi.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCERNING THE STORY LINE FROM THE MIDDLE: CHARACTERS AND PLOT

Introduction

In order to achieve greater clarity with respect to character and plot in the cosmic conflict, it is necessary to go over the Old Testament ground once more, this time with an eye on the leading agents of the two sides and on the words and actions with which these characters are associated. On both counts the gains promise to be substantial.¹

As to characters, the poem in Isaiah names the character fighting a losing battle in Revelation (Isa 14:12), investing him with characteristics quite different from the negative connotation of his names, titles, and actions in Revelation (12:9; 20:2). These allusions literally give background to the protagonist of evil. On the other hand, there also seems to be an ill-defined boundary between the triumph of Jesus (12:5) and the angelic figure Michael (12:7) in Revelation. As to action, the verbal and spoken record in Isaiah's poem and in the Genesis account of the fall must be pursued in search for a clearer grasp of the plot in the native context and then in the context of Revelation (Isa 14:13-14; Gen 3:1-6).

The Characters in Revelation 12

Jesus

In what is here identified as the primordial beginning of Revelation's story line, a conflict erupts in heaven between ὁ Μιχαήλ καὶ οἱ ἄγγελοι αὐτοῦ and ὁ δράκων...

¹ Boring ("Narrative Christology," 720) voices an excessive and unnecessary nihilism with respect to the plot in Revelation on the conviction that the allusions to the Old Testament in Revelation have been stripped of their plot. "Just how the creation was perverted or went awry is not dealt with or even hinted at in this story," he asserts in a summary statement, adding the somewhat contradictory note that "the problem that is resolved in this story is a cosmic problem that finds a cosmic solution."

καὶ οἱ ἄγγελοι αὐτοῦ (12:7). The identity and characteristics of the parties thus described pose a number of questions. Michael is only named once in Revelation, but his role seems to encroach on, or at least to overlap with, Christ's function and prerogatives. While the narrative initially describes the cosmic battle as a conflict of Michael with the dragon and their respective angels, a pointed shift appears to occur in course of telling the story. Collins observes that "when the dragon has been defeated the kingdom is awarded, not to Michael and his angels, but to Christ."² Ford takes note of the same phenomenon, remarking that "it is strange for it to be Michael, rather than the Messiah, who overcomes the dragon."³ She is equally puzzled by the brief appearance of the male child in the story since nothing more is said of him despite his obvious importance in the conflict.⁴

The possibility of such an encroachment is enhanced by the existence of numerous angelic representations of God in the Old Testament,⁵ by the prominence of

² John J. Collins, "The Son of Man and the Saints of the Most High in the Book of Daniel," *JBL* 93 (1974), 65. That Michael is the victor over the dragon is also pointed out by Bousset (*Offenbarung*, 340). Boring ("Narrative Christology," 710) takes away a similar impression from the struggle that lies at the heart of Revelation, thus "the Messiah plays a rather minor and passive role. He is born, rescued from the dragon, and caught up to God and to His throne. At the exaltation of the Messiah, the dragon is defeated and cast down from heaven. But it is Michael and his armies, not the Messiah, who defeats him." Kalms (*Sturz des Gottesfeindes*, 72) also points it out as a difficulty for the interpretation of Revelation 12 that Christ is not leading the struggle.

³ Ford, *Revelation*, 194.

⁴ "Curiously enough," Ford (*Revelation*, 205) observes, "the child does not reappear (unless he is to be identified with the Anointed One in the interpolated passage in 12:7-13." This puzzle can have no other resolution than that the male child in 12:5 and the anointed one in 12:10 in some way meet in the same person.

⁵ In his overview and discussion of the "Angel of the Lord" concept in the Old Testament, Charles A. Gieschen (*Angelomorphic Christology* [AGAJU 42; Leiden: Brill, 1998], 51-69) differentiates between depictions where God and the angel are indistinguishable, that is, a visible manifestation of God, and instances where the angel is distinct from God but shares God's authority. Gieschen points to Ex 23:20-1 as the crucial text in support of the second category. In the light of this evidence James D. G. Dunn's claim that "'the angel of Yahweh' is simply a way of speaking about Yahweh himself" seems overly simplistic and should not be accepted as a foregone conclusion; cf. *Christology in the Making* (2nd ed.; London: SCM Press, 1989), 150.

Michael in the book of Daniel⁶ and in Jewish apocalyptic works,⁷ and by angelic or angelomorphic depictions of Christ in early Christian writings.⁸ While the extent and meaning of angelic representations of Christ are disputed,⁹ it raises relevant questions

⁶ Lewis O. Anderson, Jr. ("The Michael Figure in the Book of Daniel," Ph.D. Dissertation, Andrews University, 1997, 439) sees Michael combine "within his person the functions of the Angel of the Lord as the personal guide and guardian of Israel, of the Son of Man as the transcendent being who appears at the eschaton, and of the Messiah, as the hoped for eschatological deliverer."

⁷ There is little doubt that Michael emerges as the principal named angel in Jewish literature in the pre- and early Christian era (Gieschen, *Angelomorphic Christology*, 125-37). As to identity, the enigmatic *11Q Melchizedek* at Qumran pictures a heavenly figure that seems to conflate Melchizedek and Michael. As to function, this figure is to effect atonement, achieve the overthrow of Belial, and usher in of the year of jubilee; cf. M. de Jonge and A. S. van der Woude, "11Q Melchizedek and the New Testament," *NTS* 12 (1966), 301-26; see also James R. Davila, "Melchizedek, Michael, and War in Heaven," *SBL Seminar Papers* 1996, 259-72; Darell D. Hannah, *Michael and Christ: Michael Traditions and Angel Christology in Early Christianity* (WUNT 2.109; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999), 75. In a wide-ranging study of angels in Qumranic literature, Maxwell J. Davidson (*Angels at Qumran* [JSP Sup 11; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992], 148, 263) argues that the Prince of Lights in the *Rule of the Community* is an angel, and that this angel, following Yigael Yadin, is Michael. Davidson also sees Michael as the Prince of Lights, God's angel of truth and the spirit of truth in the *Two Spirits Discourse*.

⁸ An identification of Christ with Michael seems almost certain in *Shepherd of Hermas* (*Herm. Sim.* 8.3.3); cf. J. Daniélou, *The Theology of Jewish Christianity* (trans. John A. Baker; London: Darton, Longman and Tood/Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1964), 124; Halvor Moxnes, "God and His Angel in the Shepherd of Hermas," *ST* 28 (1974), 49-56; Carolyn Osiek, *Shepherd of Hermas* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 204. Collins ("Son of Man," 65) designates the celebration of victory in Rev 12:10 as "an example of angelic christology" because "the role allotted to Michael or another angelic figure in Jewish texts is here allotted to Christ." Based on the literary relationship between descriptions of an angel in Daniel and the risen Christ in Revelation and on the assumption that an angelophany also has ingredients of a theophany, Christopher Rowland sees early Christology aided by Jewish angelology; cf. "The Vision of the Risen Christ in Rev i.13 ff.: The Debt of An Early Christology to An Aspect of Jewish Angelology," *JTS* 31 (1980), 1-11; idem., "A Man Clothed in Linen: Daniel 10.6ff. and Jewish Angelology," *JSNT* 24 (1985), 99-110.

⁹ Dunn (*Christology*, 158) makes the sweeping and improvable assertion that "there is no evidence that any NT writer thought of Jesus as actually present in Israel's past, either as the angel of the Lord, or as 'the Lord' himself," while reluctantly making allowance for angelomorphic descriptions of Christ in Revelation (p. 156). Larry W. Hurtado (*One God, One Lord: Early Christian Devotion and Ancient Jewish Monotheism* [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988], 74) comes to the New Testament evidence with a more nuanced question than does Dunn, asking not whether any of its writers viewed Christ as an angel but rather "whether Jewish angelology may have assisted early Jewish Christians in coming to terms theologically with the exalted Christ." Richard Bauckham ("The Throne of God and the Worship of Jesus," in *The Jewish Roots of Christological Monotheism*, eds. Carey C. Newman, James R. Davila, and Gladys S. Lewis [Leiden: Brill, 1999], 43-69) takes a skeptical view of the entire concept of 'angelomorphic Christology,' discounting visual resemblances as a blind alley because descriptions of a heavenly being are not specific enough to establish the identity of that being with certainty. Instead, God is set apart from all other beings as "sole Creator and sole Supreme Ruler," and perceptions of God's unique identity are manifested in worship, which is specifically denied to or refused by angelic beings. Identification of Jesus with God, not divine bifurcation or some angelic intermediary figure, mediates in Bauckham's view the early Christian understanding of Christ.

with regard to the Michael figure in Revelation to the point that some interpreters see ὁ Μιχαήλ as Christ.¹⁰

One cannot take the answer to this question for granted one way or the other. It is also clear that the importance of this question for the story line is considerable. If it is decided that Michael cannot refer to Christ, it will be necessary to delimit the role of the Michael figure so as not to detract from Christ the victory overwhelmingly attributed to him in the cosmic conflict depicted in Revelation. This is particularly vital since the victory ascribed to Christ relates to the means by which victory is achieved (5:6, 9; 12:5; 19:1, 13). If, on the other hand, the Michael figure stands for Christ, it is equally important to explore underexposed parameters in the story that could account for such terminology and conflation of identity.

There is no doubt that the risen Christ in Revelation is portrayed in language previously used by Daniel (Rev 1:13-16; Dan 10:5-6).¹¹ It seems equally certain that the "man clothed in linen" in Daniel's vision has angelic form (Dan 10:5; 12:6-7; cf. Rev 10:5-6). The person introduced in Revelation can be none other than the risen Jesus, saying of himself, "I was dead, and see, I am alive forever and ever" (1:18).¹² Jesus is here invested with angelic or angelomorphic characteristics, but he is also

¹⁰ Cf. Collins, "Son of Man," 65. Robert H. Gundry ("Angelomorphic Christology in the Book of Revelation," *SBL Seminar Papers 1994*, 662-78) finds Revelation replete with angelomorphic representations of Christ also in the sense that Christ assumes the functions of an angel. Traugott Holtz (*Die Christologie der Apokalypse des Johannes* [TU 85; Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1962], 117-18) notes the angelomorphic features in Revelation's description of Christ, but he thinks that the author departs sufficiently from the Old Testament text to distinguish Christ from an angel. Rowland ("Vision of the Risen Christ," 1-11) is not saying that Christ is seen ontologically as an angel in Revelation, but he maintains that Old Testament angelology is a feature of early Christology. Adela Yarbro Collins (*Cosmology and Eschatology in Jewish and Christian Apocalypticism* [JSJSup 50; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1996], 159) concludes that "the book of Revelation expresses an angelic Christology which is best understood in the context of the Jewish motif of the principal angel."

¹¹ This is hardly a new insight, but it has been laid out again in persuasive detail by Peter F. Carrell in *Jesus and the angels: Angelology and the christology of the Apocalypse of John* (SNTSMS 95; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 148-65.

¹² Yarbro Collins, *Cosmology and Eschatology*, 172-73.

endowed with attributes belonging to “an Ancient One” (Dan 7:9, NRSV) or “the Ancient of Days” (NKJV). As the Ancient of Days takes his seat on the fiery throne, Daniel notes “the hair of his head like pure wool” as one of his features (Dan 7:9).¹³ Revelation applies the same feature to Christ (1:14). Characteristics of an angel and attributes belonging to God are thus conflated to represent Jesus.¹⁴ The angel appearing to Daniel is not Michael, but the implication is that had Daniel described Michael, he would have had a similar appearance.

It is possible to make these elements mean no more than stock descriptions of an exalted heavenly being,¹⁵ but one cannot be entirely confident that the author of Revelation had no more than this in mind. Michael is looming ever larger in Daniel’s representations. He is described as “one of the chief princes” (10:13), “your prince” (10:21), and finally “the great prince, the protector of your people” (12:1).¹⁶ Two possibilities are especially noteworthy in Lewis O. Anderson’s study of the Michael figure in Daniel. He suggests that when Daniel writes that “Michael shall arise,” one could appropriately substitute “at that time shall Yahweh arise.”¹⁷ The other notable feature is Daniel’s intimate association of Michael with the resurrection (Dan 12:1), especially in view of the fact that explicit references to the resurrection are extremely

¹³ Loren T. Stuckenbruck (*Angel Veneration and Christology: A Study in Early Judaism and in the Christology of the Apocalypse of John* [WUNT 2/70; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1995], 213) finds it significant that this characteristic is the only one exclusively associated with God.

¹⁴ Carrell (*Jesus and the angels*, 155-56) may be correct that these external similarities are not intended to suggest identity of Christ with the Ancient of Days or with an angel.

¹⁵ Cf. Bauckham, “Worship of Jesus,” 51.

¹⁶ Daniel 12:1, עֲמֹד עַל-בְּנֵי עַמּוֹךְ, מִיְּמֵד מִיְּכָאֵל הַנִּשְׁרָה הַגָּדוֹל is translated in the LXX as καὶ κατὰ τὴν ὥραν ἐκείνην παρελεύσεται Μιχαὴλ ὁ ἄγγελος ὁ μέγας ὁ ἐστηκὼς ἐπὶ τοὺς υἱοὺς τοῦ λαοῦ σου, or as καὶ ἐν τῷ καιρῷ ἐκείνῳ ἀναστήσεται Μιχαὴλ ὁ ἄρχων ὁ μέγας ὁ ἐστηκὼς ἐπὶ τοὺς υἱοὺς τοῦ λαοῦ σου (Th). Of particular concern is the meaning of יְעֹמֵד, “he shall take his stand,” and the participle הָעֹמֵד, “the one who takes his stand,” or “the one who stands for..”

¹⁷ Anderson, “Michael Figure,” 288. Daniel’s perspective and wording echo an older Old Testament expectation, such as expressed in Isa 3:13 and Isa 11:10.

rare in the Old Testament.¹⁸ Qumran evidence that assigns a decisive role to Michael in the cosmic combat against Satan does not lie far from the function attributed to Michael in Revelation.¹⁹ Complicating matters further is Darrell Hannah's conclusion that Christ in the New Testament has acquired the functions attributed to Michael in Jewish traditions, whether as leader of the heavenly armies in Revelation, as High Priest in Hebrews, or as bearer of the Divine Name.²⁰

Refocusing the issue as it appears in Revelation, it is Michael who leads the winning side in the war against the dragon (12:7), but when the moment comes to celebrate the triumph, Michael no longer seems to be in view.²¹ Instead, the ensuing and comprehensive doxology points to Christ as the agent of victory for "the kingdom of our God" (ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν) and "the authority of his Messiah" (ἡ ἐξουσία τοῦ Χριστοῦ αὐτοῦ; 12:10). It has also been suggested that the repeated use of ἐβλήθη, "he was cast out" (12:9), is a circumlocution of divine activity to the effect that "the dragon was cast out not by Michael and his angels but ultimately by God."²²

Additionally, the means of conquest in the conflict is said to be "the blood of the lamb" (12:11). Of the models proposed for the meaning of angelic agency in the Old Testament,²³ the tendency to cast Michael as an angelic representative in the sense of an

¹⁸ Anderson, "Michael Figure," 291-92.

¹⁹ Davila, "Melchizedek, Michael, and War in Heaven," 265, 270.

²⁰ Hannah, *Michael and Christ*, 161.

²¹ Carrell, *Jesus and the angels*, 209-10. Kalms (*Sturz des Gottesfeindes*, 74) notes that while Michael leads the angelic host in 12:7, "there is no more mention of Michael" when the armies of heaven are described in 19:14.

²² Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 695.

²³ Gieschen (*Angelomorphic Christology*, 53-57) reviews seven different models that have been proposed for 'angel of the Lord' agency in the Old Testament. These theories are interpolation (G. von Rad), representation (Heidt), identity (W. Eichrodt), Logos (Philo), hypostasis (H. Ringgren), *l'âme extérieure* (A. Lods), and messenger theory (A. S. van der Woude). Five of these see the angel as indistinct or barely distinct from God (identity, Logos, *l'âme extérieure*, hypostasis, and messenger),

inferior being is saddled with the weakness that this view may be the least satisfactory of the models used to explain apparitions of the 'Angel of the Lord' in the Old Testament.²⁴ While Daniel and other Jewish literature show a host of functions accruing to Michael, the same literature does not envisage Michael's sudden eclipse and the assumption of his functions by another figure. These expectations affirm Michael's importance, and the relationship between Michael and Christ therefore concerns the perception of the plot.

Michael leads the angelic host in the first explicit description of the cosmic conflict (12:7), but in the later, more extensive, and definitive account Christ leads the heavenly armies (19:11-16).²⁵ Peter Carrell takes this to mean that Michael's role has been superseded by Christ, assuming that in John's eyes Daniel "understood God's intentions in a limited way."²⁶ Daniel's deficient understanding on this point led John to conclude "that some attributes and actions associated with Michael should be transferred to Jesus Christ."²⁷ This is one possibility, but it is hardly more plausible than to suggest that John understood Michael in a different way or that there may be another way to comprehend Michael.²⁸ Darrell Hannah solves the apparent eclipse of

where Eichrodt's identity theory is the most radical, holding the angel to be simply a manifestation of God. Only one theory (representation) sees the agency as that of an inferior being distinct from God. The messenger theory envisions such a close union between the sender and the messenger that the angel becomes an extension of God.

²⁴ Cf. Walther Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament* (trans. J. Baker; 2 vols.; London: SCM Press, 1967), 2:23-29.

²⁵ In Rev 12:7 Michael leads the angels in the heavenly battle; in 19:11, 14 Christ, pictured as a Rider on a white horse, rides forth in battle, and τὰ στρατεύματα (τὰ) ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ ἡκολούθει αὐτῷ.

²⁶ Carrell, *Jesus and the angels*, 209.

²⁷ Carrell, *Jesus and the angels*, 210.

²⁸ Carrell (*Jesus and the angels*, 194) considers three texts in depth for examples of angelomorphic Christology in Revelation, 1:13-16, 14:14, and 19:11-16. On Rev 14:14 he writes that "this appearance of Jesus involves a *temporary* separation from the divine throne and the *temporary* assumption of angelic form and function." Equally tantalizing is the possible reference to Michael as the Angel of the Name in *1 Enoch* 69:13-25. On this point Hannah (*Michael and Christ*, 51-52) offers highly suggestive evidence that the hidden name referred to is the Name of God. In the context of Michael's

Michael by making the victory that features Michael a partial victory (12:7-10) whereas the definitive victory is unambiguously won by Christ (19:11-20:10).²⁹ This proposal is also one of several possible options, but it is diluted by the impression that victory is already attributed to Christ even when Michael is in view (12:7-11), and Hannah's suggestion also tends to obscure the means by which victory is won.³⁰

One remaining option is to assign more 'background' even to Jesus. Narrative analysis has singled out Jesus as a round character in Revelation,³¹ but certain constraints of orthodox Christology may have to be modified for his 'roundness' to emerge in force. If, as Bauckham suggests, worship is the most reliable indicator of monotheism and divine identity,³² and if worship of Jesus draws the most unequivocal line of distinction between Jesus and angels in Revelation,³³ Jesus belongs decisively on the side of God.³⁴ But this warranted and unqualified affirmation may paradoxically flatten Jesus' character in Revelation unless divine ontology and angelomorphic phenomenology are further delineated. Representations of Christ, especially attempts to represent the pre-existent Christ,³⁵ may not only be determined by limitations of perception or by stereotypical expression. These representations also confront the

role in Revelation, Gieschen (*Angelomorphic Christology*, 126) takes the theophoric element in his name to be "very telling of the significance that this angel enjoyed."

²⁹ Hannah, *Michael and Christ*, 128.

³⁰ Attention to means is evident in 19:11, ἐν δικαιοσύνῃ κρίνει καὶ πολεμεῖ.

³¹ Resseguie (*Revelation Unsealed*, 22) sees Jesus' round character reflected in the Son of Man designation (1:12-20), the Lion and the Lamb (5:5-7), and the warrior on a horse (19:11-16).

³² According to Bauckham ("Worship of Jesus," 48), the Jewish understanding of monotheism refers to "the unique divine identity as distinguished from all other reality especially in that God is sole Creator and sole Supreme Ruler of all things."

³³ Bauckham, "Worship of Jesus," 67.

³⁴ Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 137-38.

³⁵ Pre-existence is here accepted as a basic premise and will not be argued further.

confounding factor of the disposition and character of the pre-existent Christ.

Interpreters who take the specific language used to portray Jesus as significant point out that angelomorphic representation of Jesus does not automatically invest these representations with ontological significance.³⁶

A less recognized but compelling feature in Revelation is that the worship of Jesus is not only predicated on the presumption of his divinity but also on his humiliation and self-sacrificing love (Rev 1:5; 5:6).³⁷ On this point the theological aspirations of a high Christology may not parallel the means by which to represent this disposition or leave enough room for the depth of his character. What kind of picture will emerge, one may ask, if the tendency of the human Jesus to assume a position lower than his rightful place has to be extended to the pre-existent Christ? Throughout the New Testament Jesus extols humility and lowliness of disposition not only as elements of his own character or as commendable human virtues, but as traits that are part and parcel of a thoroughgoing ethic of *imitatio Dei*. Affirmation of the divine disposition looms as large as affirmation of the divine identity.³⁸ How would manifestations or perceptions of such a figure be represented?

³⁶ Giblin ("Structural and Thematic Correlations," 494) suggests that Revelation does not always distinguish clearly phenomenologically between an angelic and a divine person. Likewise, Rowland ("A Man Clothed in Linen," 100) affirms angelomorphic depictions of Christ, but this is not to be taken as evidence that Christ is to be seen as an angel or that he is identified as a created being.

³⁷ As to the Christology of the *Ascension of Isaiah*, Bauckham ("The Worship of Jesus in Apocalyptic Christianity," *NTS* 27 [1981], 334-35) notes that Christ is worthy of worship by virtue of his pre-existent status, but his enthronement is predicated on his redemptive work.

³⁸ A number of statements show that royal and hierarchical models that see a chasm between the sovereign and his subjects are particularly inadequate and are often referred to by way of contrast: "For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve" (Mark 10:45); "I am gentle and humble in heart" (Matt 11:29); "I am among you as he that serves" (Luke 22:27); "he will serve them" (Luke 12:37); "if I, your Lord and Teacher have washed your feet" (John 13:14); "the Father is greater than I" (John 14:28). It is possible to see the Markan Son of Man saying that he came "not to be served" (10:45) and the Lukan "he will serve them" (12:37) as particularly telling examples, one reaching back into the pre-incarnational past, the other looking ahead to the eschatological future. Participation in the divine identity and the bent of the divine disposition are alike affirmed in Phil 2:5-11.

A final incentive not to rush to conclusions on this point is found in the enigmatic title given to Jesus in the epilogue of Revelation. "It is I, Jesus, who sent my angel to you with this testimony for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star" (22:16). Why does Jesus refer to himself as "the bright morning star"?

The phrase is notable as one of several ἐγώ εἰμι statements in Revelation.³⁹ Excluding the significant allusion to the messianic prophecy in Isaiah, the phrase becomes ἐγώ εἰμι...ὁ ἀστὴρ ὁ λαμπρὸς ὁ πρωϊνός (22:16).⁴⁰ R. C. H. Lenski sees an appositional quality in the entire expression, meaning that each adjective is to be emphasized separately because "each is a climax to the noun."⁴¹ This emphasis means that "Jesus is the Bright Star. He is also the Morning Star."⁴²

But the most intriguing option opens up when an Old Testament antecedent for this expression is sought. Who is the star that is thought to be deserving of this pointed and telling designation in the Old Testament? According to M. S. Moore, there does not appear to be any Old Testament passage where Yahweh gives himself the title, "I am the bright and morning star."⁴³ But there is a text that speaks of "the bright morning star." Reserving the detailed discussion of the term used to describe the opposing side

³⁹ Related statements are found in Rev 1:8, 17; 2:23; 21:16.

⁴⁰ Note the closely related wording of the promise to the church in Thyatira, καὶ δώσω αὐτῷ τὸν ἀστέρα τὸν πρωϊνόν (Rev 2:28).

⁴¹ R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. John's Revelation* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1963), 125-26, 669; M. S. Moore, "Jesus Christ: 'Superstar' (Revelation xxii 16b)," *NovT* 24 (1982), 89.

⁴² Moore, "Jesus Christ: 'Superstar'," 90.

⁴³ Moore, "Jesus Christ: 'Superstar'," 83.

in the conflict till later, Isaiah 14:12 commends itself as the text that corresponds most closely to the term Jesus applies to himself in Revelation.⁴⁴

ὁ ἀστὴρ ὁ λαμπρὸς ὁ πρωϊνός (Rev 22:16)

ὁ ἑωσφόρος ὁ πρωὶ ἀνατέλλων (Isa 14:12, LXX)

הַיֵּל בֶּן־שָׁחַר (BHS)

More needs to be said concerning the expression *hêlêl ben šahar*, but the requisite substantival component (star) and adjectival modifiers (bright, rising) are certainly present in the Septuagint as well as in the Hebrew text. Attempting a translation that is sensitive to the idiom in Isaiah and to its counterpart in Revelation, the wording could be, “How you have fallen from heaven, (you) bright morning star!” In the context of the cosmic conflict and in view of the fact that Revelation alludes to the poem in Isaiah concerning the fall of the brightest star, the combat theme leaves an imprint on how the statement should be understood. Coming from the mouth of Jesus, the victor in the conflict, it reads, “I am...the bright morning star” (22:16), denying this distinction to the adversary.

If this is correct, it juxtaposes Christ and his fallen opponent as the main adversaries in the conflict from first to last. It has already been argued that allusions to this passage in Isaiah represent the point of departure for the combat theme and the larger story line in Revelation 12. When, as the conflict is all but over, Jesus assumes the honorific title of his opponent, this title is profoundly resonant with the leading characters in the conflict and the issue at stake. The appropriation of this title does not signify that Christ and his opponent were ever on equal terms ontologically, but it urges

⁴⁴ While Moore (“Jesus Christ: ‘Superstar’,” 83, 85-88) sees an allusion to Num 24:17 in this verse, he finds it plausible that the star that was to rise out of Jacob could have a Babylonian mythological antecedent, offering the conjecture that the message was delivered by a foreigner who might have been of Mesopotamian descent. Independently of links on the level of the messenger, Moore argues persuasively that Isa 14:12 is in view. Bauckham (*Climax of Prophecy*, 324-25) sees Num 24:17-19 and Isa 60:3 behind the designation of Jesus as “the bright morning star.”

closer attention to their respective background.⁴⁵ If this title once belonged to the losing protagonist in the cosmic drama, it means that he was at one time a being attired in the brightest heavenly splendour. Moreover, for the fallen and defeated opponent to appear as “the bright morning star” was a title held in trust. In the end the title reverts to the one who bestowed it. When Christ claims this title in the epilogue of Revelation, he can do it as the “I am,” ontologically speaking. Much of the force is nevertheless lost if this claim is heard only on the level of ontology, emphasizing the divine status of Christ over against the created status of the defeated foe in the cosmic conflict. It must also be heard on the level of disposition, making the disposition of the divine claimant to the title the weightiest argument for his worthiness to bear it. The diction of the statement must therefore carry an emphasis that preserves the memory and the perspective of the prior conflict, “I am...the bright morning star” (22:16), and, implicitly, ‘my adversary is not.’

The preceding attempt to nuance the meaning of the angelomorphic representations of Christ in Revelation indicates that there are hazards on both sides of the issue. One pitfall is to see Christ as an angel in ontological terms, obscuring the fact that he stands above the created order in Revelation’s narrative. But caveats also apply if Christ is placed exclusively in the context of depictions of God in Second Temple Judaism, where “the throne of God, at the summit of them all [the heavens], is envisaged as unimaginably high above the earth, and even above the various ranks of

⁴⁵ The background in question parallels the story thought by some interpreters to be embedded in the hymn in Phil 2:5-11, contrasting one who did not seek his own glory with an opponent who illegitimately did reach after equality with God. Among studies exploring the theme of cosmic combat as the background for the Philippian hymn are Ernst Lohmeyer, *Kyrios Jesus. Eine Untersuchung zu Phil. 2,5-11* (2nd ed.; Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1961; [1st ed. 1927/28]), 27-28; Ethelbert Stauffer, *Die Theologie des Neuen Testaments* (Genf: Oikumene, 1945), 47-51; A. Feuillet, “L’hymne christologique de l’Épître aux Philippiens (II, 6-11),” *RB* 72 (1965), 375-76; Ralph P. Martin, *Carmen Christi. Philippians ii. 5-11 in Recent Interpretation and in the Setting of Early Christian Worship* (SNTSMS 4; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 154.

angels who serve God in the lower heavens”⁴⁶ because this trajectory tends to eclipse the lowly disposition of the person in view. Revelation’s bivalent depiction of Christ has in common with the Christology of the rest of the New Testament that it seems to be just as concerned about the lowliness of Jesus as about his exalted status. Indeed, his exaltation takes place in full cognizance of the lowly path of service and suffering that he has taken (5:9). In Revelation his freely chosen lowliness stands in the foreground in the combat theme and is hailed as the basis for his triumph.⁴⁷ Expressing this in admittedly anthropomorphic terms, it is possible that the pre-existent Jesus did not think it below his dignity to appear as an angel or to assume the function of an angel any more than to *be* a human being. Self-effacing behaviour and lowly function must for this reason not be overlooked or be allowed to create confusion with respect to his true identity.

In the present search for greater clarity with respect to the leading characters in Revelation’s combat theme, the Michael figure is traditionally seen as the angelic agent commissioned to execute God’s purpose on God’s behalf. This view of Michael, ontologically perceived as a created, subordinate being, sets limits to what such a figure can accomplish in context of the evolving story line in Revelation. If he leads the fight, he wins only in a secondary and delegated sense unless the issue to be resolved is one that can be settled by means available to Michael.⁴⁸ But this possibility demands a

⁴⁶ Bauckham, “Worship of Jesus,” 53. References to the throne of God as an exclusive signifier of worship breaks down somewhat in Revelation with Jesus’ promise to the conqueror that he, too, will have “a place with me on my throne, just as I myself conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne” (3:21).

⁴⁷ Ontology and disposition are inseparable in Revelation, but the emphasis on disposition as a criterion for worthiness is nevertheless remarkable. The *Lamb* “is the dominant christological symbol of the Apocalypse,” cf. Adela Yarbro Collins, *The Apocalypse* (NTM 22; Dublin: Veritas Publications, 1979), 40; see also Holtz, *Christologie der Apokalypse*, 39; Stuckenbruck, *Angel Veneration and Christology*, 265.

⁴⁸ This point concerns the issue of means. Rev 12:8 says of the dragon that “he was not strong enough” (οὐκ ἴσχυσεν, aor. sing.). A victory on the part of an angelic Michael that triumphs by virtue of

further qualification. If the unfallen angels are led by Michael, again perceived ontologically as a created being subordinate to God, he cannot win unless the issue in the cosmic conflict can be solved through delegated authority.⁴⁹

If, as most interpreters find unlikely, Michael represents the pre-existent Jesus in angelic form, his leading role in the war in heaven begins with a retrospective allusion to the pre-incarnational reality, and the Michael designation corresponds to the vantage point of the Old Testament. Michael fights and wins this war; his opponent “is not strong enough” (12:8), and it is implied that strength in this context is not measured according to a physical scale. When, in a closely related tableau, Jesus fights and wins (19:11), the text need not describe that Jesus has superseded Michael but that the identity of the figure represented as Michael blends into the other. In this paradigm Jesus stands at the centre of the conflict throughout, and, as the figure of the slaughtered Lamb will bring out more clearly (5:6), it is important to see him at the centre because the resolution of the conflict depends entirely on him.

Satan

In the war in heaven in Revelation, the side opposed to God is described as “the dragon and his angels” (12:7). The identity of the leader is further explicated; he is called ὁ δράκων ὁ μέγας, ὁ ὄφις ὁ ἀρχαῖος, ὁ καλούμενος Διάβολος καὶ ὁ Σατανᾶς, ὁ πλανῶν τὴν οἰκουμένην ὅλην (12:9; cf. 20:2). This thoroughly and uniformly negative

superior physical strength threatens to overshadow the sacrificial path chosen by Christ as the means of victory.

⁴⁹ This point concerns the plot of the cosmic conflict that is yet to be explored. Nevertheless, anticipating the issue in the conflict from the vantage point of the relationship between Michael and Christ, delegated authority suffices only in a limited sense. If the conflict revolves around God’s reputation and character as the serpent’s insinuation in the Garden of Eden implies (Gen 3:1), God alone can set things right. This requirement seems to be understood in the scene of the sealed scroll where no one is found worthy to open the book (5:2-3) and also in the description of the rider of the white horse in 19:11-16, where Jesus ostensibly has superseded Michael as the leader of the angelic host. The robe of the rider is “dipped in blood” (19:13), an allusion to Isa 63:1-5. The passage in Isaiah emphasizes that the agent acted alone; “there was no helper;” “there was no one to sustain me” (Isa 63:3, 5).

portrayal hardly invites further investigation of the character, and little interest has been forthcoming. Narrative analysis puts Satan in the lowest order of *personae* in Revelation. He is seen not as a round or even as a flat character, only as a stock character.⁵⁰ This view, I suggest, is insufficiently attentive to the specific scriptural background of Revelation and more deficient still by failing to appreciate the strands of the cosmic conflict in the Old Testament. The poem in Isaiah to which Revelation alludes for its war-in-heaven theme, gives the leader of the opposing force an exceptional and exalted name. He is called הֵלֵל בֶּן־שָׁחַר, transliterated as *hēlēl ben šahar* (Isa 14:12). If this designation belongs within the allusive field that comes with Revelation's appropriation of the combat theme in Isaiah, it bears materially on the story line in Revelation. Above all, it means that the opposing side in the cosmic conflict has 'background.'

The composite term used to describe the fallen leader in Isaiah is not without problems. Evidence indicates that *hēlēl* comes from the Hebrew root *hll* and has the meaning "to shine" or "to shine brilliantly."⁵¹ The substantival *hēlēl* may be translated "shining one."⁵² The term *šahar*, from the root *šhr*, is less problematic and is generally translated "morning" or "dawn."⁵³

⁵⁰ Resseguie, *Revelation Unsealed*, 21-22.

⁵¹ Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, Charles A. Briggs (BDB), *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 237; David J. A. Clines, *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew* (5 vols. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), II, 562, 542.

⁵² Frantz Delitzsch (*Biblical Commentary on the Prophecies of Isaiah* [trans. S. R. Driver; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1892], 309) gives the notion of shining special emphasis, "the glittering star," based on the quadriliteral הֵלֵל, an intensive form of הָלַל. J. Skinner (*Isaiah 1-39* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1915], 122) has "Shining One." P. C. Craigie ("Helel, Athtar and Phaeton [Jes 14, 12-15]," *ZAW* 85 [1973], 223) reads "shining" as a likely derivative from the Akkadian *Ellu*. Donald V. Etz ("Is Isaiah XIV 12-15 a Reference to Comet Halley?" *VT* 36 [1986], 291) supports *hll* as the root with the meaning "shine."

⁵³ BDB, 1007.

Bible translations of these terms reflect only minor variations conveying the same basic imagery, indicating broad and persistent consensus among translators: "O shining star of the dawn" (Moffatt); "Daystar, son of Dawn" (JB); "bright morning star" (NEB); "O star of the morning, son of the dawn" (NASB); "O morning star, son of the dawn" (NIV); "O Day Star, son of Dawn" (RSV, NRSV); and "O Lucifer, son of the morning" (KJV, NKJV).⁵⁴ Commentaries do not differ much from the standard translations. Otto Kaiser prefers "Shining Star, son of the Dawn."⁵⁵ Wildberger is somewhat more emphatic and possibly more idiomatic with "du strahlender Stern, des Morgenroths Sohn,"⁵⁶ while Joseph Blenkinsopp has the more ordinary "Star of the dawning day."⁵⁷

These variants are here reproduced in the main text in order to make their significance to the story line Revelation more immediately apparent. If John harnessed this text for the theme of cosmic conflict in Revelation, and if "the bright morning star" appeared on his mental horizon as the original representation of the fallen antagonist in the conflict, it confirms an important premise in the present reconstruction of Revelation's story line. This premise is absorbed in the notion of this being as "the light bearer," corresponding to *Lucifer* of Jerome's Vulgate. It means that the insurgent in the conflict was once an illustrious heavenly being. His background cannot be bypassed as irrelevant to his character in Revelation because the capacity to subvert the

⁵⁴ The KJV translators adopted *Lucifer* from the Vulgate with the connotation of a name, and the NKJV has retained this wording. Whether this reflects a conservative tendency intended to accommodate the history of interpretation and *Wirkungsgeschichte* of one particular interpretation is debatable since the original wording also may imply a name.

⁵⁵ Otto Kaiser, *Isaiah 13-39* (London: SCM Press, 1974), 28.

⁵⁶ Wildberger, *Jesaja 13-27*, 532.

⁵⁷ Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1-39* (AB; New York: Doubleday, 2000), 283. Specific studies of the passage that offer their own translation add little to range of meanings already surveyed. Hubert Bost ("Le chant sur la chute d'un tyran en Esaïe 14," *ETR* 59 [1984], 4) has "Astre brillant, Fils de l'Aurore." Gale A. Yee ("The Anatomy of Biblical Parody: The Dirge Form in 2 Samuel 1 and Isaiah 14," *CBQ* 50 [1988], 585) proposes "O Bright One, son of Dawn."

divine government stands in proportion to his original status. The consequences of this for the story line in Revelation are clearly far-reaching.

The consistent identification of *hēlēl* as a star by modern translators is supported by the earliest known attempt by translators to convey the meaning of *hēlēl* to readers unfamiliar with Hebrew. To the Greek translators of the Septuagint *hēlēl* became ὁ ἑωσφόρος (Isa 14:12), 'the bearer of dawn.' Jerome, striving to prioritize the Hebrew text over the Septuagint in his Latin translation, could on this point do no better than his predecessors. *Hēlēl* became *Lucifer*, 'the light bearer.'⁵⁸ Both of these translations retain the meaning of *hēlēl* as "the shining one" with predominant emphasis on the verbal element. In the Aramaic Targum of Isaiah the star-connotation of the Hebrew is unequivocal; *hēlēl* is seen not only as a star but is one among many stars, כְּכֹכַב נִהָא בֵּין כּוֹכְבֵּיא⁵⁹ translated by Bruce Chilton "as the bright star among the stars."⁶⁰

When Revelation alludes to *hēlēl*, the substantival element of the star predominates, and it serves as a recurrent source of allusions throughout the book. John writes that "his tail swept down a third of *the stars of heaven* and threw them to the earth" (12:4), referring to the dragon, but it is possible to substitute the original portrait of the shining *hēlēl* in the sentence, and it is quite appropriate to do so for the high drama to emerge. Other glimpses of the same theme do in fact make the substitution. When the third angel blows his trumpet, "*a great star* fell from heaven, blazing like a

⁵⁸ Skinner (*Isaiah 1-39*, 122) finds the Vulgate *Lucifer* fully in line with the Hebrew idiom.

⁵⁹ Alexander Sperber, *The Bible in Aramaic: The Latter Prophets according to Targum Jonathan* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1962), 30.

⁶⁰ Bruce D. Chilton, *The Isaiah Targum (The Aramaic Bible)* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1987), 32-3.

torch" (8:10).⁶¹ This is repeated from the angle of a completed action under the fifth trumpet; "I saw a star that had fallen from heaven to earth" (9:1).⁶²

In these examples the Hebrew point of reference would be *hēlēl*. At the blowing of the third trumpet, *hēlēl* "fell from heaven, blazing like a torch" (8:10), and under the fifth trumpet *hēlēl* is the star "that had fallen from heaven to earth" (9:1). Since the poem in Isaiah supplies the verbal action in view, and since, like Isaiah, it locates the action to be a movement from heaven to earth, the subject of the action cannot be left out. In the poem the subject is *hēlēl*, and the author of Revelation affirms *hēlēl* to be the subject of his story, too, sometimes referring to him as the bright and exalted star and sometimes as a being in his fallen state.

The present chapter has already reviewed potential sources for the war-in-heaven theme in Revelation, concluding that the story in Revelation differs so much from the proposed mythological antecedents that simple derivation is untenable.⁶³ Its main source seems to be the Old Testament, and the Old Testament antecedents in the story of the fall in Genesis and of the war in heaven in Isaiah, fleshed out within the context of the Christian world view and narrative, must be seen as the leading contributors to the story line in Revelation 12. These sources, it now appears, particularly the poem in Isaiah, also provide invaluable and neglected 'background'

⁶¹ καὶ ἔπεσεν ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ἀστὴρ μέγας καίόμενος ὡς λαμπάς in Rev 8:10 reads as a close parallel to πῶς ἐξέπεσεν ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ὁ ἑωσφόρος ὁ πρῶτὸς ἀνατέλλων in Isa 14:12, the parallels spanning noun (star), verbal action (fell), and location (from heaven).

⁶² καὶ εἶδον ἀστέρα ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ πεπτωκότα εἰς τὴν γῆν in Rev 9:1 has a perfect participle for the verbal action in view, but otherwise it reads as a close parallel to the poem in Isaiah, πῶς ἐξέπεσεν ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ὁ ἑωσφόρος (Isa 14:12). It also matches the war-in-heaven theme in Rev 12:7-9. The parallels include the subject (star), verbal action (fallen), and location (from heaven to earth).

⁶³ Yarbrow Collins (*Combat Myth*, 67), as noted, concludes in favour of the Greek myth of the birth of Apollo to Leto. Aune (*Revelation 6-16*, 671-72) points out weaknesses in Yarbrow Collins' study, proposing a corrective that sees John drawing on multiple mythological sources. Common to both approaches is the tendency to focus only on similarities between the possible mythological antecedents and the story in Revelation, ignoring the significant dissimilarities.

concerning the characters in Revelation. A better grasp of this character emerges if one proceeds to explore and appraise the plot.

The Plot in Isaiah 14:12-20

Significantly, the poem in Isaiah that looms so large in Revelation's combat theme has been found to have exceptional literary qualities. Skinner calls it "one of the finest specimens of Hebrew poetry which the Old Testament contains."⁶⁴ Kaiser takes the accolade a notch higher, describing the passage in question as "one of the most powerful poems not only of the Old Testament, but of the whole literature of the world."⁶⁵ Assigning it to a specific poetic genre, Gale A. Yee sees it as perhaps "the finest example of the prophetic dirge parody,"⁶⁶ and Joseph Jensen extols the song as "a magnificent composition, rich in imagination and allusive force."⁶⁷

The wording describing the plot of the funeral song reflects to varying degrees the extent to which the translators see mythological elements in the poem, but the plot itself is quite unaffected by these variations.⁶⁸ According to the NRSV the cause espoused by *hêlêl* aimed at the overthrow of the divine government. "You said in your

⁶⁴ Skinner, *Isaiah 1-39*, 120.

⁶⁵ Kaiser, *Isaiah 13-39*, 29.

⁶⁶ Yee, "Biblical Parody," 573-74.

⁶⁷ Joseph Jensen, "Helel ben Shahar (Isaiah 14:12-15) in Bible and Tradition," in *Writing and Reading the Scroll of Isaiah* (eds. Craig C. Broyles and Craig A. Evans; Leiden: Brill, 1997), 339.

⁶⁸ A case in point is the whether the reference to *zaphon*, left transliterated *Zaphon* in the NRSV, refers to the specific mountain where the gods held their assembly in Ugaritic mythology or whether *zaphon* simply means "the north" as in the NKJV. Most scholars find the mythological link unassailable, yet not all agree that Mt. Zaphon is in view. Among scholars who favour Mt Zaphon are Jensen, "Helel ben Shahar," 341; William L. Holladay, "Text, Structure, and Irony in the Poem on the Fall of the Tyrant, Isaiah 14," *CBQ* 61 (1999), 641; Brevard S. Childs, *Isaiah* (OTL; Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 126. Scholars denying that Mt. Zaphon is in view include Frank Moore Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1973), 38; Etz, "Isaiah XIV 12-15," 297. Wildberger (*Jesaja 13-27*, 531) sees *hêlêl* aiming to take his place "auf den Versammlungsberg (der Götter) in des Nordens äusserstem Bereich."

heart, 'I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit on the mount of assembly on the heights of Zaphon; I will ascend to the tops of the clouds, I will make myself like the Most High'" (Isa 14:13-14). What led to fierce combat in heaven, culminating in the expulsion of "the Shining One" (Isa 14:12), was the attempt by this heavenly being to assume prerogatives that did not belong to him. From a subtle beginning in the rebel's heart (Isa 14:13a), his secret aspiration matured into open revolt. This goal on the part of the rebel has failed to generate much interest among interpreters despite the staggering nature of the underlying proposition. Rather than exploring the action of the proposed plot in its own context, commentaries are far more interested in pursuing the alleged mythological background of the poem, leaving the theological implications of the poem virtually untouched.⁶⁹

The poem in Isaiah is not the only source for the theme of cosmic rebellion in the Old Testament, countering the view that mere snippets of this theme have been preserved.⁷⁰ The triangular relationship that has been suggested for the most significant

⁶⁹ The theme of cosmic rebellion appears to suffer the same fate among interpreters that has been suggested for the sources for this theme in the biblical material. Levenson (*Creation and the Persistence of Evil*, 136) finds traces of a lost myth in the Old Testament describing the ejection of a godlike figure from the pantheon. While more than traces are surely found, he volunteers the tantalizing rationale that the preserved material is scant and fragmentary because the account of an uprising against God impugns God's sovereignty and therefore violates the instincts of the orthodox believer. On this basis he assumes that the theme has been repressed but not completely obliterated, accounting "for the fact that we now have snippets, and only snippets."

⁷⁰ Cf. Levenson, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil*, 136. Gunkel (*Schöpfung und Chaos*, 30-114) finds more than snippets of the combat theme in the Old Testament. Under various combat metaphors he discusses Isa 30:7; 51:9-10; Ps 40:4; 87:4; 89:10-15; Job 9:13; 26:12-13 (Rahab); Ps 74:12-19; 104:25-26; Isa 27:1; Job 3:8; 40:25-41:26 (Leviathan); Job 7:12; Ps 2:28-34; 44:20; Jer 51:34ff.; Ezek 29:3-6; 32:2-8 (dragon in the sea); Amos 9:2-3 (serpent); Ps 104:5-9; Job 38:8-11; Prov 8:22-3; Jer 5:22; 31:35; Ps 33:6-8; 65:7-8 (variants). Julian Morgenstern's seminal essay, "The Mythological Background of Psalm 82" (*HUCA* 14 [1939], 29-126) works out the troubling theology of the fall of godlike beings in Psalm 82, seeing Isa 14:12-14 as the older and most significant version of the story behind the Psalm and Gen 6:1-4 as a later and less important version. He also takes Ezek 28:11-28 and Rev 12:7-9 to be passages reflecting the same story. Marvin Pope (*El in the Ugaritic Texts* [VT Sup 2; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1955], 103) argues in a similar vein that an ancient myth of theomachy or Titanomachy is reflected in the passages describing the fall of a heavenly being in Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28. Richard Clifford (*The Cosmic Mountain in Canaan and the Old Testament* [Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1972], 162, 173) concurs that the theme of cosmic rebellion seems certain in the related passages in Genesis 2-3, Isaiah 14, and Ezekiel 28. Hugh Rowland Page, Jr. (*The Myth of Cosmic Rebellion: A Study of Its*

passages dealing with the cosmic conflict in the Old Testament corresponds with the sources for this theme in Revelation.⁷¹ In addition to the poem describing the fall of "the Shining One" in Isaiah, the two other points in the triangle include the poem concerning the fall of the figurative king of Tyre in Ezekiel (Ezek 28:11-19) and the Genesis story of the fall (Gen 3:1-6).

The Plot in Ezekiel 28:11-19

Like the poem about the fall of "the Shining One" in Isaiah the dirge in Ezekiel is notable for its literary qualities.⁷² The text conflates past and present, earth and heaven, the fall of the highest angel and the fall of human beings,⁷³ but at its core lies the story of "the Shining One," here described as the "covering cherub" (Ezek 28:16), making it evident that the author ultimately has a heavenly being in view.⁷⁴

Reflexes in Ugaritic and Biblical Literature [VT Sup 65; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1996], 110-205) concentrates attention on Gen 6:1-4; Isa 14:4-20; Ezek 28:1-19; Psalm 82; Job 38:1-38; Dan 11:21.36-39.45; 12:1-3).

⁷¹ Joseph Jensen argues persuasively that the three members of this triangle of passages are Genesis 2:7-3:24; Isaiah 14:12-15, and Ezekiel 28:1-19; cf. "Helel ben Shahaar (Isaiah 14:12-15) in Bible and Tradition," 343. There is wide agreement among scholars that the passages in Isa 14:12-15 and Ezek 28:12-19 are closely related; cf. Morgenstern, "Psalm 82," 111-12; Robert H. O'Connell, "Isaiah XIV 4B-23: Ironical Reversal through Concentric Structure and Mythic Allusion," *VT* 38 (1988), 418; Walther Zimmerli, *Ezekiel*, trans. James D. Martin, 2 vols. (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), II, 94; Rowland Page, *Cosmic Rebellion*, 151-58; Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1-39*, 288. Less familiar is the relationship between the Genesis story of the fall and the prophetic passages, but the links between Genesis 3 and Ezekiel 28 have been noted by a number of scholars, notably Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis* (trans. Israel Abrahams; Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1961), 76-81. See also John W. Wevers, *Ezekiel* (NCB; London: Nelson, 1969), 216-17; John B. Taylor, *Ezekiel* (London: The Tyndale Press, 1969), 196-97; Walther Eichrodt, *Ezekiel* (trans. Cosslett Quinn; OTL; London: SCM Press, 1970), 392; Zimmerli, *Ezekiel* II, 90-91.

⁷² S. Fisch (*Ezekiel. Hebrew Text & English Translation with an Introduction and Commentary* [SBB; London: The Soncino Press, 1950], 188) calls the poem in Ezekiel "a lament of striking imaginative power."

⁷³ The polymorphism of the passage as a description of the human situation and an angelic or 'divine' subject is carefully preserved and delineated by Moshe Greenberg (*Ezekiel 21-37* [AB; New York: Doubleday, 1997], 588-89).

⁷⁴ Disputing interpretations that see only an embellished human subject in the poem, Greenberg (*Ezekiel 21-37*, 584) segments the text so as to leave little doubt that the author has an angelic being in mind, a cherub: "and I set you in the holy mountain; a divinity you were" (Ezek 28:14b). This view is in contrast to the unconvincing argument on behalf of a mere human subject, as suggested e.g. by John L. McKenzie, "Mythological Allusions in Ezek 28 12-18," *JBL* 75 (1956), 323-24.

Son of man, take up a lamentation for the king of Tyre, and say to him, Thus says the Lord GOD: "You *were* the seal of perfection, Full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. You were in Eden, the garden of God; Every precious stone *was* your covering: The sardius, topaz, and diamond, Beryl, onyx, and jasper, Sapphire, turquoise, and emerald with gold. The workmanship of your timbrels and pipes Was prepared for you on the day you were created. You *were* the anointed cherub who covers; I established you; You were on the holy mountain of God; You walked back and forth in the midst of fiery stones. You *were* perfect in your ways from the day you were created, Till iniquity was found in you. By the abundance of your trading You became filled with violence within, And you sinned; Therefore I cast you as a profane thing Out of the mountain of God; And I destroyed you, O covering cherub, From the midst of the fiery stones.

Ezek 28:12-16, NKJV⁷⁵

The exalted character of this being is of the same order as "the Shining One" in Isaiah. He was "the seal of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty" (Ezek 28:12); "the anointed cherub who covers" (Ezek 28:14), or simply the "covering cherub" (Ezek 28:16).⁷⁶ From the vantage point of Revelation this is another reminder that the agent of deceit and destruction in the cosmic conflict originally had quite a different status and function. Like "the Shining One" in Isaiah he is expelled from his original abode, cast "as a profane thing out of the mountain of God" (Ezek 28:16), repeated again with the spatial parameters found in Isaiah and in Revelation, "I cast you to the earth" (Ezek 28:17).⁷⁷

The action of the plot covers the same ground as in Isaiah in the sense that the main subject aspires for a higher role than the one allotted to him. Nevertheless, there is an additional feature in Ezekiel's portrayal.

⁷⁵ Translational differences are considerable among various versions. The NKJV is chosen because it best approximates the scholarly discussion as to textual and translational variants.

⁷⁶ The pointing of אִתְּךָ before כְּרוּב in Ezek 28:14 is significant. Should אִתְּךָ be taken as the sign of the direct object, "with the cherub," or as the personal pronoun, second pers. masc., "you were a ...cherub"? Greenberg (*Ezekiel 21-37*, 579) offers persuasive evidence for the latter option.

⁷⁷ The action of being thrown *to the earth*, עַל-אֲרֶץ הַשָּׁלִיכְתִּיךָ (BHS); ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν ἔρριψά σε (LXX) parallels Isa 14:12 and the action in Rev 12:7-9.

Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty;
You corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendour...
Ezek 28:17

As warrant for aspiring to a higher status the cherub's self-aggrandizement is inspired by his exceptional beauty and endowments. Neither these endowments nor the prominent position he enjoys, however, are to be seen as the *cause* of his downfall. Quite the contrary, the passage assumes that his aspiration is without cause and wholly unwarranted. His transformation and the emergence of illicit ambition are conveyed with an aura of astonishment by the poet, "You were perfect in your ways from the day you were created, till iniquity was found in you" (Ezek 28:15).

Further nuances regarding the background of the angelic character in the poem may be gleaned by reviewing variant constructions of the text and their translation. H. J. van Dijk suggests for the main subject of the poem the intriguing variant, "You, O Serpent of perfection" (Ezek 28:12),⁷⁸ an option that certainly strengthens the link to the serpent in the Genesis story of the fall and to the identity of the adversary in Revelation. Keith W. Carley suggests that the being in question "set the seal on perfection,"⁷⁹ while the poet in Moshe Greenberg's translation addresses his subject with the words,

You were the sealer of proportion,
full of wisdom and perfect in beauty!⁸⁰

While the range of variants is considerable, the core meaning remains stable. The poet is straining to describe his subject as the epitome of beauty, the standard by

⁷⁸ The text is difficult, and the translation here reads *hawwat-m taknît* for MT *hôte m toknît*; cf. H. J. van Dijk, *Ezekiel's Prophecy on Tyre. A New Approach* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1968), 113.

⁷⁹ Keith W. Carley, *The Book of the Prophet Ezekiel* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 190.

⁸⁰ Greenberg, *Ezekiel 21-37*, 579. Zimmerli (*Ezekiel*, 81) brackets his translation, "You were a completed <signet>...", probably with good reason, since the connotation of an artistically wrought seal is doubtful; cf. van Dijk, *Ezekiel's Prophecy*, 114.

which beauty and perfection are measured.⁸¹ His flawlessness is matched by the exalted status he enjoys and the corresponding intimacy to God. Whether the subject is designated as “the far-covering cherub,”⁸² as “a wing-spread Cherub,”⁸³ or as “a great shielding cherub”⁸⁴ (Ezek 28:14), the expression evokes the image of the *cherubim* in the Most Holy in the Jewish tabernacle and in Solomon’s temple, spreading their wings over the ark.⁸⁵ This connotation intensifies the sense of intimacy with God. As “a great shielding cherub” the subject occupied the position of God’s intimate in God’s immediate presence. Whether the ‘shielding’ is perceived as protection, covering, or hovering, it suggests a being preoccupied with God and entrusted with God’s interests. The weighty trust thereby implied comes out still more forcefully in van Dijk’s translation, “I appointed you as the guardian” (Ezek 28:14).⁸⁶

As to the action of the plot in the poem, variant translations are consistent in emphasizing that the cherub was seized with a sense of his own superior qualities with the implication that these qualities were not properly appreciated and recognized. Where one translation emphasizes the subject’s beauty as the occasion for his self-exaltation,

Your heart became proud because of your beauty;
you spoiled your wisdom for the sake of your splendour (28:17),⁸⁷

⁸¹ Significantly, the Aramaic Targum of Ezekiel has למנא רצורחא אח דמי, translated “you were like the sculptural mold” by Samson H. Levey (*The Targum of Ezekiel* [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1987], 83).

⁸² Fisch, *Ezekiel*, 192.

⁸³ van Dijk, *Ezekiel’s Prophecy*, 119.

⁸⁴ Greenberg, *Ezekiel 21-37*, 579.

⁸⁵ This picture of a covering, hovering, or protecting cherub may be found in Ex 25:20; 37:9; 1 Chr 28:18; 1 Kings 8:7, and this association is supported by Fisch (*Ezekiel*, 192), Zimmerli (*Ezekiel*, 85), and Greenberg (*Ezekiel 21-37*, 584).

⁸⁶ van Dijk, *Ezekiel’s Prophecy*, 93, 119.

⁸⁷ van Dijk, *Ezekiel’s Prophecy*, 93.

another also speaks of wisdom corrupted and beauty lost,

Your heart grew haughty on account of your beauty,
You corrupted your wisdom together with your radiance (Ezek 28:17).⁸⁸

Perhaps most significant is the climax of the poem which also corresponds to the culmination of the cherub's career.

וְאִנְצֵא־אֵשׁ מִתּוֹכְךָ הִיא אֲכָלְךָ וְאֶחָד לְאֶפֶר עַל־הָאָרֶץ

The nuances in this text have for the most part been preserved in translations, but important details deserve special emphasis. The most important is the *hiphil* of the first verb, indicating that the fire that destroys the cherub is brought forth from within the cherub himself. That is, the fire that destroys him is not sent against him from without. This sense is preserved with precision in the literal "I brought fire from your midst" (Ezek 28:18; NKJV) as well as the even more pointed "I brought out fire from within you" (NRSV).⁸⁹

This understanding invests the action of the second verbal element with a sharpened emphasis. Whether the statement is made to read "it devoured you" (NKJV) or "it consumed you" (NRSV), the stress is as much on the cause as on the verbal action. What consumes its subject is not only fire as such but fire set alight and burning within the subject itself. It is the fire *from within you* that accomplishes the subject's destruction, soliciting the emphasis, "I brought out fire from within you; *it* consumed you" (NRSV).⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Greenberg, *Ezekiel 21-37*, 579.

⁸⁹ These translations compare well with Fisch (*Ezekiel*, 193), "therefore have I brought forth a fire from the midst of thee, it hath devoured thee"; van Dijk (*Ezekiel's Prophecy*, 219), "so I brought forth fire from the midst of you; it consumed you"; Greenberg (*Ezekiel 21-37*, 580), "So I caused fire to break out from your midst; it consumed you."

⁹⁰ The case for this emphatic reading is also supported by the pronoun אֵת preceding the verbal action. Similar emphasis on agency is also evident by the τοῦτο in the LXX, καὶ ἐξάξω πῦρ ἐκ μέσου σου τοῦτο καταφάγεται σε καὶ δώσω σε εἰς σποδὸν ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς.

The striking and specific turn of phrase shows that the exalted, covering cherub in Ezekiel's poem, *alias* "the Shining One" in Isaiah, is felled by his own fateful action. Several commentaries have picked up this detail and emphasized its importance. Fisch comments that "the evil in the midst of Tyre will be the flame which reduces her to a heap of burnt ruins."⁹¹ In Greenberg's observation the "fire from your midst" signifies "evil causing its own destruction."⁹² Such a view of how evil comes to an end is not incidental in Ezekiel. The demise of the covering cherub finds a parallel in the prior description of the undoing of the apostate princes of Israel. In their case, too, "fire has gone out from its stem" (Ezek 19:14), indicating destruction rising from within.⁹³

Close attention to the text in Ezekiel shows a careful gradation and progression in the ruination of the cherub. From his exalted role in God's immediate presence he is expelled from God's mountain, cast to the earth, consumed by fire, and reduced to ashes.⁹⁴ Even though the metaphors in the poem in Isaiah are slightly different, the perception of the main character, the action of the plot, the spatial parameters of his downfall, and the final passing of the subject from stage fully warrant the conclusion that the two poems are closely related. Moreover, this shorthand 'biography' covers the same ground as the story of the adversary in Revelation.⁹⁵ While the poem in

⁹¹ Fisch, *Ezekiel*, 193.

⁹² Greenberg, *Ezekiel 21-37*, 587. Taylor (*Ezekiel*, 197) also attributes the fire that reduces its subject to ashes to destruction rising from within the subject.

⁹³ Self-destruction is also implied in Isaiah's poem about "the Shining One." In the end it is said of him that "you have destroyed your land, you have killed your people" (Is 14:20). Here the LXX substitutes "*my* land" and "*my* people" for the consistent pronominal suffix indicating "*your* land" and "*your* people" in the MT.

⁹⁴ Greenberg, *Ezekiel 21-37*, 588.

⁹⁵ As to identity the cherub is seen as an angelic being that is hurled to the earth with the same connotation of battle as in Isaiah and in Revelation. The thematic parallels exceed the verbal parallel, which is strictly speaking limited to '*I cast you to the earth*' (Ezek 28:17). The possibility that 'the earth' in this context means the underworld or compasses the underworld is suggested by van Dijk (*Ezekiel's*

Isaiah suffices to substantiate the story line in Revelation, it is unwarranted to forego the use of Ezekiel's poem because it, too, alludes to the fall of an angelic being from heaven to earth, attributing earthly conditions to his agency.⁹⁶

In his highly influential study of the influence of this story on Psalm 82, Julian Morgenstern argues convincingly in favour of its antiquity, the close relationship between the two poems explored above,⁹⁷ and the pervasive influence of these poems on biblical literature.⁹⁸ One feature of his emphatic conclusion explains the allusive quality of the texts in question because allusiveness is predicated on prior familiarity with the subject matter. More is heard than is said and more is seen than is shown to the one discerning and appropriating the allusion.⁹⁹

All this evidence establishes with absolute certainty that the myth which we have found cited in several variant forms in apocalyptic and N.T. writings, the myth of the fall of Satan and his associate angels from heaven to earth, or even into the abyss, is identical with the myth of Helel ben Shahaar of Isa. 14.12-14, that, in other words, we have to do in all these passages with one myth, which must have been current in Judaism for a very long period and which quite naturally in the course of its evolution and its adaptation to various purposes, historical and theological, developed slightly variant forms. That the form of the myth as we find it in Isa. 14.12-14 is older by a few centuries than the form which we find in the apocalyptic and N.T. writings is self-evident from the fact

Prophecy, 121-22), but ambiguity in this respect only strengthens the parallel to Isaiah's poem and to Revelation's account.

⁹⁶ In his influential study of Revelation's use of Ezekiel, Vanhoye ("Ézechiel dans l'Apocalypse," 454) stresses verbal parallels at the expense of the thematic correlation between the combat theme in Revelation the corresponding account in Ezekiel. He does not give broad exposure to Ezek 28:11-19 in the development of this theme in Revelation, but he sees the description of the precious stones in Rev 21:19 as a possible allusion to Ezek 28:13. This connection is not a trivial one, however. According to Vanhoye (p. 440), Ezekiel's description of the fall of Tyre (chs. 26 and 27) is in view in the lamentation over the fall of Babylon in Rev 18:9-19, indicating that the fall of Babylon in Isaiah and the fall of Tyre in Ezekiel are conflated in the author's mind. It is only a short step from this conflation to the conclusion that the suprahuman instigator behind the oppressive powers Babylon and Tyre should also be conflated. Worthy of note in Vanhoye's study is also that Revelation draws heavily upon Ezekiel for its account of the end (Rev 19:17-21 and Ezek 39:4, 17-20; Rev. 20:8-9 and Ezek 38 and 39). A similar point is made by Ruiz (*Ezekiel in the Apocalypse*, 177).

⁹⁷ Morgenstern, "Psalm 82," 111-12.

⁹⁸ As to New Testament allusions to the poem in Isaiah, Morgenstern ("Psalm 82," 100-1) mentions Luke 10:18, 2 Cor 11:14, Rev 12:7-9 and Rev 20:1-7.

⁹⁹ This point is well expressed by Etz ("Isaiah XIV 12-15," 297).

that whatever be the date assigned to Isa. 14, it is certainly older by at least a century, and more probably by approximately three centuries, than the oldest of the apocalyptic passages in which the myth is cited.¹⁰⁰

Before turning to the story of the fall in Genesis and its contribution to the plot in Revelation, it is prudent to circumscribe the present inquiry with four annotations. First, if it seems odd to assign primacy to poetic Old Testament passages in the development of Revelation's story line, such reservations may in part stem from failure to appreciate the character of poetic speech in the Old Testament.¹⁰¹ The poetic form must not be construed to mean the absence of theological depth and perspicuity. On this point Samuel Terrien notes that the poetic discourses "represent theological thinking at its keenest and deepest."¹⁰² When the prophet resorts to poetic speech, he is not eschewing the sober form of prose for the less thoughtful vehicle of poetry. The poetic form is the currency of his trade and commission: that is how the prophet talks. Projecting the content of these poems more distinctly and on a larger screen is wholly a piece with the use of the Old Testament in the New. In general terms the dualistic world view of the New Testament is explicit where the dualism in the Old Testament may be implicit or ambiguous. But the writers of the New Testament do not see themselves introducing a new worldview. The scriptures they quarry make the roots of the narrative of good and evil run deep in the Old Testament. If the New Testament makes certain things central that in the Old Testament seem occasional, obscure, submerged, or peripheral, such a reading derives from the conviction of the New Testament authors that the Old Testament nevertheless is telling *their* story, or, with the

¹⁰⁰ Morgenstern, "Psalm 82," 110.

¹⁰¹ Samuel Terrien (*The Elusive Presence: Toward A New Biblical Theology* [New York: Harper & Row, 1978; repr. Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2000], 227-28) writes that "the prophets of Israel were true poets" who, among other things, "cultivated all forms of rhetorical beauty and possessed a respect for the word that provokes thinking..." See also Terrien's note on poetic idiom on p. 337.

¹⁰² Terrien, *Elusive Presence*, 278.

Gospel of Luke as the prime example, that the narrative of what is known as the New Testament is part and parcel of one indivisible testament.¹⁰³

In specific terms, Revelation's use of Old Testament poems in its narrative of cosmic combat may seem remarkable because it is unfamiliar, but it is no different in kind from the logic that operates with respect to New Testament Christology. The New Testament mines Old Testament poetry with no less imagination and determination for its understanding of Jesus than does Revelation in its attempt to shed light on the origin and undoing of evil.¹⁰⁴

This leads to a second point because the New Testament method of reading the Old Testament should not be seen as arbitrary, or at least it should be assumed that such readings were not arbitrary in the eyes of its writers. Whether or not pagan mythology lies behind the story of "the Shining One" in Isaiah or the poem of the covering cherub in Ezekiel, stories of war in heaven are found in the Hebrew scriptures. If these are mere snippets, as Levenson suggests,¹⁰⁵ they are nevertheless there, and they are made to loom large in the New Testament perception of reality.

More significantly, the texts in question invite a reading that goes beyond simple historical allegory. Zimmerli seems to acknowledge as much when he calls the poem in

¹⁰³ The task of enlisting Old Testament support for his life, death, and mission is in Luke handled most explicitly by Jesus himself, and the appropriation applies to the entire sweep of the Old Testament witness (Luke 24:27, 44-47). In Acts a similar appropriation is achieved by Paul (Acts 9:22; 13:32-37; 24:14-15; 26:27). For a bold interpretation of how the Gospel of Luke enlists the Old Testament in support of its own doctrine, see C. Kevin Rowe, "Luke and the trinity: an essay in biblical theology," *SJT* 56 (2003), 1-26.

¹⁰⁴ A case in point is the role played by Psalm 110 in New Testament Christology. Bauckham ("The Throne of God and the Worship of Jesus," 61-62) notes that Psalm 110:1 "is the verse of the Hebrew Scriptures to which Christological allusion is most often made in early Christian literature" even though this text, for one, had little or no importance as a messianic text in Second Temple Jewish thinking. See also Martin Hengel, "'Setze dich zu meiner Rechten!' Die Inthronisation Christi zur Rechten Gottes und Psalm 110,1," in *Le Trône de Dieu* (ed. Marc Philolenko; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1993), 108-94.

¹⁰⁵ Levenson, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil*, 136.

Ezekiel "mysteriously cryptic,"¹⁰⁶ and the enigmatic nature of this theme is also evident in Luther's question, "Why does Scripture make this account so obscure? Why does it not rather state directly that the angel who had fallen entered the serpent, was speaking through the serpent, and deceived Eve?"¹⁰⁷ The answer for the obscurity was in his view that "all things might be held over for Christ and for His Spirit,"¹⁰⁸ but even if Luther's point is granted, it is doubtful that the author of Revelation saw these texts quite as obscure as Luther makes them out to be. When Revelation harnesses these texts the reason is rather that they burst at the seams with primordial overtones and the connotation of ultimacy in a way that corresponds with the theme and aspiration of his own account.¹⁰⁹

A third area requiring clearer boundary markers relates to the background of the combat theme in the Old Testament. The present interpretation holds that this subject is developed in Revelation partly because it is an Old Testament theme, but where does the Old Testament account come from? The widely held assumption of direct derivation from pagan mythology seems to be an inadequate explanation for the appearance of this theme in Isaiah and Ezekiel for the same reason that pagan mythology fails to account for this subject in Revelation. Each of the leading candidate sources is fraught with liabilities that have not been given their due in comparative

¹⁰⁶ Zimmerli, *Ezekiel* II, 95.

¹⁰⁷ Martin Luther, *Lectures on Genesis 1-5* (trans. George V. Schick, in *Luther's Work I*, eds. J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald & H. T. Lehmann; Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1958), 145.

¹⁰⁸ Luther, *Lectures on Genesis 1-5*, 145.

¹⁰⁹ Origen is best known for his allegorical interpretation of Scripture, but on the subject of personal evil in the Old Testament he counts on a near-literal reading of the text to bring the deeper meaning to light. Commenting on Ezek 28:11-19, he writes that the subject of the text "is most evidently of such a kind that it cannot possibly refer to a man, but must be understood of some higher power, which had fallen from higher places and been cast down to lower and worse ones" (*First Principles* 1.5.4). Since the text aims at exposing only of the sins of Tyre but the power behind Tyre, the text does not fit "a human being, even a saint, not to mention the prince of Tyre" (*First Principles* 1.5.4).

studies. Scholars who argue that *Hēlēl ben Šahar*¹¹⁰ corresponds to Phaeton in Greek mythology build their case on the equivalence of *Hēlēl* with Phaeton, both words meaning 'shining.'¹¹¹ The similar designation is deemed sufficient to support derivation. Other scholars emphasize that the deity identified with Venus, the morning and evening star in Ugaritic mythology, is Athtar, assuming that *Hēlēl ben Šahar* is identical to the morning star under the name of Athtar in the mythology of Ugarit.¹¹² Whether the Greek or the Ugaritic myth is said to be in view, the relationship rests either on the meaning of the name or on the star to which the name refers. Little or no attention is paid to the respective plots in these myths.

In the Greek myth Phaeton prevails on his father to allow him to drive his chariot, but Phaeton wreaks havoc when he proves unable to control the powerful solar horses. Order is restored only when Jupiter (or Zeus) strikes him down with a thunderbolt.¹¹³ Athtar in Ugaritic mythology comes across as a bland and somewhat unassuming deity who is elevated to the throne in Baal's absence. It soon turns out that Athtar is unable to fill the shoes of the virile and powerful Baal.¹¹⁴ The Ugaritic story

¹¹⁰ Here *Hēlēl ben Šahar* is written with capital letters in deference to scholars who wish to see it as a name rather than merely as a descriptive designation, thereby intending to enhance the derivative and mythological connotation.

¹¹¹ P. Grelot ("Isaïe XIV 12-15 et son arrière-plan mythologique," *RHR* 149 [1956], 18-48) assigns primacy to the Greek myth of Phaeton, but he also seeks to combine it with the Ugaritic myth of Athtar. His chief argument is based on the meaning of the terms or its astral reference. Thus, "Hēlēl fils de Šahar est le même personnage mythique que Phaéton fils d'Éôs" (p. 30). In the astral myth of Ugarit the hero "est le dieu Attar, surnommé 'le brillant' (Hēlēl, Phaéton), fils de Šahar (Éôs), l'Aurore; il personnifie l'étoile du matin, la planète Vénus." John C. Poirier ("An Illuminating Parallel to Isaiah XIV 12," *VT* 49 [1999], 379) argues that Phaeton should be equated with Heosphoros based on a text by the Greek poet Callimachus. Blenkinsopp (*Isaiah 1-39*, 288) favours derivation from the Phaeton myth for the story in Isaiah.

¹¹² Clements, *Isaiah 1-39*, 182; Hubert Bost, "Le chant sur la chute d'un tyran en Esaïe 14," *ETR* 14 (1984), 13; Craigie, "Helel," 223; and most significantly, Rowland Page, *Cosmic Rebellion*, 129-32.

¹¹³ Ovid, *Metamorphoses* II (trans. A. D. Melville; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 23-36.

¹¹⁴ G. R. Driver, *Canaanite Myths and Legends* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1956), 21.

describes his inadequacy in graphic and poignant terms after he has ascended the throne,

his feet did not reach the stool
his head did not reach its top.¹¹⁵

Nowhere in the Ugaritic sources is there any evidence that Athtar usurps Baal's throne, that he brazenly thinks himself fit for higher office, or that he resists stepping down when his inadequacy is exposed. Athtar is appointed by El to assume Baal's throne in the latter's absence. Once his diminutive physical frame makes him look puny on the great throne, he willingly surrenders the prerogative.¹¹⁶ Thus, despite the probable identification of Athtar with the morning star, the plot in the myth could hardly differ more from the aspiration and action of the subject in the biblical poems in Isaiah and Ezekiel. In like manner the flimsy plot in the Greek myth seriously undermines the case for derivation. Other details reveal dissimilarities that put a relationship further in doubt. Phaeton in Greek mythology is the son of Helios.¹¹⁷ Athtar in Ugaritic sources is the son of Athirat.¹¹⁸ The etymology of Athtar is ambiguous and unresolved.¹¹⁹ Fitness to rule in the Ugaritic myths based on proof of sexual virility and prowess, an element that is totally alien to the Old Testament stories.¹²⁰ Perhaps most disconcerting is the almost subliminal tendency to allow the

¹¹⁵ KTU 1.6 I 59-61, translation by Rowland Page, *Cosmic Rebellion*, 66.

¹¹⁶ Rowland Page, *Cosmic Rebellion*, 108.

¹¹⁷ Poirier, "Isaiah XIV 12," 374. J. W. McKay, "Helel and the Dawn-Goddess," *VT* 20 (1970), 451-64.

¹¹⁸ Driver, *Canaanite Myths*, 21.

¹¹⁹ Mark Smith, "The God Athtar in the Ancient Near East and His Place in KTU 1.6.1," in *Solving Riddles and Untying Knots: Biblical, Epigraphic, and Semitic Studies in Honor of J. C. Greenfield* (eds. Z. Zevit et al.; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1995), 636-37.

¹²⁰ Pope (*El in the Ugaritic Texts*, 37-39) gives the description of El's 'hand' a phallic connotation. When doubts arise concerning El's vitality,
El's 'hand' grows long as the sea,

Hebrew poems to exert their influence retroactively on the myths said to underlie them and thereby raise the prestige of the alleged sources. The 'forward' argument is based on superficial similarity in semantic range and astral reference, serving as points of contact to establish a relationship. The 'backward' argument borrows subtly from the plot in the biblical poems, allowing it to invest the meagre plot of the myths with vitality or even to overrule and replace the plot that is there.¹²¹ Equally remarkable is the tendency to dismiss the acknowledged dissimilarity of the plots in question as though this is of little significance.¹²² All of this leads to the conclusion that the similarities are superficial while the differences are profound. The poems in Isaiah and Ezekiel have too little in common with the purported mythological antecedents to support the argument for simple derivation.¹²³ Diminished or absent the mythological torso, these poems must be read on their own terms and interpreted within their own contexts.¹²⁴

El's 'hand' as the flood.
 Long is El's 'hand' as the sea,
 El's 'hand' as the flood.

Likewise, Baal's divine power expresses itself through exceptional sexual potency. Rowland Page (*Cosmic Rebellion*, 72) translates KTU 1.6 VI 17.ff. and KTU 1.5 V 19-21 as follows,

Baal was strong
 He laid with her 7, indeed 70 times
 She let him mount 8, even 80 times.

¹²¹ When Rowland Page (*Cosmic Rebellion*, 206) concludes his illuminating study, Athtar has acquired characteristics found only in the biblical poems, and the reconstructed plot of the myth is entirely dominated by the plot found in the biblical sources.

¹²² Even though the Ugaritic sources have no evidence of a revolt of Athtar against El, this point is brushed off by Rowland Page (*Cosmic Rebellion*, 140) as "a troublesome, though not devastating, datum."

¹²³ The inadequacy of the proposed myths behind the poems in Isaiah and Ezekiel is emphasized by Etz, "Isaiah XIV 12-15," 297; W. S. Prinsloo, "Isaiah 14 12-15 – Humiliation, Hubris, Humiliation," *ZAW* 93 (1981), 436; Miklós Köszeghy, "Hybris und Prophetie: Erwägungen zum Hintergrund von Jesaja XIV 12-15," *VT* 44 (1994), 549.

¹²⁴ While the search for mythological antecedents has had to be content with convergence on the level of the semantic range of words, one level down from etymology, it is clearly prudent to heed the caution that "meanings in Ugaritic, in pre-Hebrew, and in proto-Semitic, however interesting, are not meanings in Hebrew of the biblical period. Even if one word or form can be traced both in biblical Hebrew and in one of these other forms of language, the knowledge of this will still leave vague the question of meaning, because that is determined not by the word itself but by the network of choices and

The fourth and final annotation concerns whether the poems in Isaiah and Ezekiel should be read as songs of grief or as parodies of the dirge genre. It is clear that the poem in Isaiah conforms to the literary conventions of a dirge, closely following the pattern of David's solemn elegy after the death of Jonathan (2 Sam 1:19-27).¹²⁵ Isaiah calls the poem a *marshal* (Isa 14:4), and the translators of the LXX perceived it to be a θρῆνον, a dirge, using θρῆνον again when translating *qînâ*, the more specific Hebrew word for a song of grief as well as the self-designation of the poem in Ezekiel (Ezek 28:12). Since parody resides in the imitative features of the genre, the evidence for it must be mostly assumptive. Yee takes the poem in Isaiah to be a parody on the assumption that alien subject matter is imposed upon the dirge form.¹²⁶ Confirmation for this supposition is found in the joy elicited by the news of the death of "the king of Babylon," emotions hardly appropriate in response to a true song of mourning (Isa 14:7, 8).

But this impression should be qualified by several caveats. The break in the poem beginning with verse 12 ought not to be ignored. A slight but significant change in the subject matter seems to be accompanied by a raised intensity in the emotional tone, perhaps even marking a transition in the quality of the implied emotion. In the part describing the demise of "the Shining One" (Isa 14:12-20), there is no expressed joy or exultation, and in the corresponding poem in Ezekiel the dominant emotion

oppositions in relation to other words" (James Barr, "Semantics and Biblical Theology – A Contribution to the Discussion," [VTSup 22; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1972], 12). Kalms (*Sturz des Gottesfeindes*, 149) concedes that "a fully satisfactory explanation for the origin of this figure in the history of religion has not been found." Mathias Albani ("The Downfall of Helel, the Son of Dawn: Aspects of Royal Ideology in Isa 14:12-13," in *The Fall of the Angels* (eds. Christoph Auffarth and Loren T. Stuckenbruck; *Themes in Biblical Narrative* 6; Leiden: Brill, 2004), 62-86) thinks that a human figure is in view throughout, suggesting that this poem, rather than seeing it as a derivation from the Ugaritic myth of the descent of Athtar, is better understood as a taunt song on the failed post-mortem apotheosis of a despised king, possibly Sargon II, drawing chiefly on Egyptian conceptions. This hypothesis seems no more plausible than the theories it aspires to replace.

¹²⁵ Yee, "Anatomy of Biblical Parody," 574-75.

¹²⁶ Yee, "Anatomy of Biblical Parody," 567.

seems to be shock (Ezek 28:19). It is possible that the poem in Isaiah has an ambivalent trajectory, oscillating between joy stemming from a sense of relief that oppression has ceased and real grief in the face of the devastating end of “the Shining One.” In that case the poem offers two opportunities for its reader to be fooled, not only one. The literary sensitivity required to spot parody upon the death of the unworthy oppressor risks ambush and embarrassment if the poem, pondering the fall of “the Shining One,” also is capable of heartfelt sadness. Quite apart from any commitment as to which emotion the two poems in question seek to arouse, they reverberate as much with the memory of the original splendour and high calling of its subject as with the evidence of his ruin.

The Plot in Genesis 3:1-6

The account of the fall in Genesis is the third point in the triangle of key Old Testament allusions that contribute to the story line in Revelation 12.¹²⁷ While the poems in Isaiah and Ezekiel focus on the subject’s self-assessment, his conspiratorial aspiration is hidden from view. What “the Shining One” says, he says *in his heart* (Isa 14:13), and only in his heart is the secret desire admitted, “I will make myself like the Most High” (Isa 14:14).¹²⁸

In contrast, the plot in Genesis does not revolve around what the subject believes covertly about himself. It tells instead what he says openly to others, not about himself but about God. While the documentary hypothesis has fallen on hard times, it is at least of historical interest to note that the account is assigned to the putative J

¹²⁷ Jensen, “Helel ben Shahar,” 343.

¹²⁸ Satan’s crowning temptation in Matthew, offering Jesus the kingdoms of the world “if you will fall down and worship me” (Matt 4:9) seems inconceivable and quite incomprehensible except against the allusive background of the aspiration of “the Shining One” to ascend to the throne of God and thereby be entitled to worship.

source, vouching for its antiquity.¹²⁹ Moreover, this passage shares with the poems discussed above rare literary qualities. Applying Gerhard von Rad's general characterization of the J material to this passage, its artistic mastery is said to represent "one of the greatest accomplishments of all times in the history of thought."¹³⁰ In the narrative of the fall, the economy of expression and the vast echoing chamber that lies between what is externalized in the text and what is left unsaid are certainly deserving of this assessment.

Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God say, 'You shall not eat from any tree in the garden'?"

Gen 3:1, NRSV

The identity of the serpent in the setting of the original temptation, a vexing question to Old Testament expositors, is a lesser concern from the vantage point of Revelation. With an eye to this text Revelation gives the adversary in the cosmic conflict the title "the ancient serpent," explaining that this character is also "the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world" (Rev 12:9; 20:2). Suggestions favouring a psychological reading of the temptation may suffice in the setting of Genesis,¹³¹ but this option seems closed from the perspective of Revelation and its resolve to pinpoint the identity of the cosmic antagonist. The eagerness to see the incident purely in anthropological terms is contradicted by evidence to the contrary in the text itself and in the relation it holds to other texts.

¹²⁹ Gerhard von Rad (*Genesis* [trans. John H. Marks, 2nd ed.; London: SCM Press, 1963], 23) dates the material in the so-called Yahwist source to ca. 950 BCE. Nicolas Wyatt ("Interpreting the Creation and Fall story in Genesis 2-3," *ZAW* 93 [1981], 10) accepts the J source affiliation, dating it to the ninth or even tenth century. Claus Westermann (*Genesis 1-11* [trans. John J. Scullion; London: SPCK, 1984], 239) follows the view that the account of the fall belongs to the J source.

¹³⁰ von Rad, *Genesis*, 25.

¹³¹ von Rad (*Genesis*, 85) is emphatically opposed to any voice coming from without; to him it is "a question only of man and his guilt." The story thus operates solely on the level of human psychology.

From the point of view of Revelation the most significant such feature within the temptation story proper is the record of what happens after the fall. God addresses the serpent separately, and the verdict on the serpent in Genesis furnishes the premise for the dramatic and decisive showdown between the pregnant woman and the dragon in Revelation (Gen 3:14-15; Rev 12:1-6). As to the Genesis account in relation to other texts, the most important passage is the poem about the fallen cherub in Ezekiel (Ezek 28:12-19). Just as this poem is often read as a variant of the fall of human beings in the Garden of Eden, seeing it in purely human terms and discounting evidence that points in another direction, the cosmic dimension is also deemed expendable in Genesis.¹³² Both stories operate on two levels, in Ezekiel as the cherub and the fallen human ruler, in Genesis as the fallen cherub and the human subject not yet fallen. For this reason one cannot endorse von Rad's counsel "not to be concerned with what the snake is but rather with what it says."¹³³ The better advice from the point of view of Revelation is to pay attention to both.

Translational variants struggle to reproduce the subtlety implied in the serpent's opening question, especially the *אֵיךְ* that begins the conversation.

¹³² Greenberg (*Ezekiel 21-37*, 588-89), as noted, carefully distinguishes the story of the cherub from that of the city of Tyre. It is also necessary to pay heed to the many differences between the poem in Ezekiel and the account in Genesis. Cassuto (*Genesis*, 76-81) lists six differences between the two accounts: First, the garden in Ezekiel is 'the garden of God', whereas in Genesis the Lord planted the garden for the sake of humanity. Second, Ezekiel's 'garden' is situated "on the holy mountain of God" while in Genesis there is no mention of a holy mountain. Third, Ezekiel alludes to "the precious stones" and the gold, and fourth, to "stones of fire," both absent in the Genesis story. Fifth, the trees are described in greater detail in Ezekiel. Sixth and most significant, the being who was banished from the holy mountain in Ezekiel was a cherub, not a human being as in Genesis.

¹³³ von Rad, *Genesis*, 85. Hermann Gunkel (*Genesis* [trans. Mark E. Biddle; Macon, GA.: Mercer University Press, 1997; 1st German ed. 1901], 15) assumes that the tempter was originally an evil, serpentine demon sanitized into an animal form in Israel. John Skinner (*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis* [ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1910], 71-73) agrees that the story in an earlier form featured a god or a demon, later to be seen as the mouthpiece or impersonation of Satan. Westermann (*Genesis 1-11*, 237-8) catalogues a number of proposals that have been put forward regarding the serpent's identity, discounting especially the notion that it represents a being at enmity with God.

Gunkel gives it the emphasis, "Did God really say?"¹³⁴ Skinner turns it into a statement that is partly questioning and partly exclamatory, "*Ay, and so God has said!*"¹³⁵ R. W. L. Moberly returns the phrase to the question form, "'Has God really said?' or 'Is it true that God has said?'"¹³⁶ Robert Alter, on the other hand, replaces the interrogative element with affirmation, choosing instead to leave the end of the sentence hanging in the air, "Though God said, you shall not eat from any tree of the garden —"¹³⁷

Here, too, the devil lurks in the details. Depending on how it is heard, the speaker may be giving himself away already with the opening phrase. That is to say, adversarial intent, if not an overt adversarial tone, may be evident from the very first word. If so, the *וַיֹּאמֶר* of the opening phrase is sufficient ground by which to challenge Claus Westermann's objection to seeing a profoundly sinister antagonist at work. His claim that "the text says nothing about such enmity toward God" depends entirely on the good will of the hearer, probably the same measure of good will as the first hearers credulously granted, and it is therefore a reading that should not be received with unanimity.¹³⁸ Instead, the opening phrase sets the tone and direction for the substantive element of the accompanying statement, the thrust of which leaves little room for ambiguity, "Has God really said, 'You shall not eat of any tree of the garden?'"

Two questions naturally arise in response to this statement. Assuming the charge to be true, what is the hearer to think about the person who has issued such a severe and cruel commandment? On the other hand, assuming the allegation to be

¹³⁴ Gunkel, *Genesis*, 16.

¹³⁵ Skinner, *Genesis*, 73.

¹³⁶ R. W. L. Moberly, "Did the Serpent Get It Right?" *JTS* 39 (1988), 6.

¹³⁷ Robert Alter, *Genesis* (New York: Norton, 1996), 77-8.

¹³⁸ Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, 238.

false, why would anyone attribute such pitiless intent to the person who is at the receiving end of the indictment? Sensitivity is called for in sorting out the emotional and psychological elements that threaten to overwhelm the factual aspects of the case, but distortion of fact is the core element at the factual level, related to the divine charge that was originally framed in terms of freedom,

And the Lord God commanded the man, "You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die."

Gen 2:16-17

Against this background it is clear that distortion of the original statement lies at the heart of the speaker's strategy. The serpent seizes upon the element of God's prohibition, pretending "to have only imprecise information and would like now to be precisely informed by the people themselves."¹³⁹ Better yet, the serpent "first distorts the prohibition, and then affects surprise at it when thus distorted."¹⁴⁰ Surprise at the content of the deliberately distorted command is expressed with such sincerity as to conceal completely the fact that the one who appears to be concerned about the human situation is also the author of the distortion that warranted the concern.¹⁴¹ Thus, it is "as if the serpent had brooded long over the paradox, and had been driven to an unwelcome conclusion."¹⁴² The logic driving the serpent's argument is not only a calibrated distortion of God's command but also a careful colorization of what is left once the distortion is qualified. Moberly aptly captures the dialectic,

Instead of 'You may certainly eat from every tree of the garden' we have 'You shall not eat from any tree of the garden' attributed to God. Why should the serpent say something which, as the woman duly points out, is clearly not the

¹³⁹ Gunkel, *Genesis*, 16.

¹⁴⁰ S. R. Driver, *The Book of Genesis* (London: Methuen & Co., 1904), 44-45.

¹⁴¹ Gunkel (*Genesis*, 16) writes that the serpent "ingratiates itself through pretended sympathy."

¹⁴² Skinner, *Genesis*, 73.

case? Apart from the fact that the serpent thereby engages the woman in debate, the main point lies presumably in the *implication* of the serpent's words. What matters is not that the serpent's words are obviously false, but that they imply that a total prohibition is the sort of unreasonable prohibition that one might expect from God, who is to be seen as more interested in restriction than in freedom.¹⁴³

The serpent begins with a gross misrepresentation, backtracks in the face of contrary evidence but lives to see the mission accomplished despite the reluctant retraction. In the end there is a lingering residue of suspicion to the effect that the person charged with capriciousness and cruelty is not as capricious as rumours had it, but he is capricious nevertheless. On this point the substantive issue is profoundly theological. The serpent raises questions with respect to the quality of God's commands. Are they given for the good of human beings, or are they arbitrary?¹⁴⁴ If they are arbitrary, it must mean that God has a sordid motive, as interpreters have pointed out.¹⁴⁵ Consequently, although Dietrich Bonhoeffer's discussion of the Genesis narrative of the fall is framed within parameters that differ from the book of Revelation, his conclusion fits Revelation's paradigm perfectly, "The serpent's question immediately proved to be *the* satanic question *par excellence*, the question that robs God of his honour."¹⁴⁶

Appraising the effect of the serpent's opening statement, it is clear that his main purpose is to win acceptance for the premise that God is stern and arbitrary, not for the

¹⁴³ Moberly, "Serpent," 6.

¹⁴⁴ Westermann (*Genesis 1-11*, 239) sees the essence of the command to be that "they are provided for and at the same time protected from danger."

¹⁴⁵ Thus Gunkel (*Genesis*, 16), "God pronounced the prohibition, not in your, but in his own interest!" To Skinner (*Genesis*, 74), once the prohibition is found to be arbitrary, it means that "God is envious, inasmuch as he grudges the highest good to man..." Moberly ("Serpent," 7) agrees that the serpent attributes a base motive to God, implying that God acted out of fear or even envy.

¹⁴⁶ Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 69.

specific version that it is forbidden to eat of any tree in the garden.¹⁴⁷ This cunning strategy meets with success. When the woman corrects the serpent's version of God's command, she phrases her correction sympathetically, finding the serpent to be ill informed rather than wilfully distorting. Moreover, the serpent's success in winning acceptance for his premise is further evident when the woman of her own adds an element of severity not found in the original command. God's word, in her revised rendition, reads, "You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, *nor shall you touch it*, or you shall die" (Gen 3:3).¹⁴⁸ The momentum in the conversation has swung irrevocably in favour of the serpent. Moberly notes perceptively that there cannot be any quick fix to this conundrum because the innuendo "is not dismissed simply by pointing out the obvious inaccuracy of the serpent's words."¹⁴⁹

Once the serpent's premise is accepted, everything else is commentary. The rest of the conversation unfolds according to the terms of the initial premise. Likewise, the remainder of the action, including the decision to eat of the tree, has the momentum of inevitability (Gen 3:6). The serpent's assertion that there can be no ill consequences if she disobeys the command, flatly contradicts God's word (Gen 2:17; 3:4). Absence of consequences is further proof of the arbitrariness of the command, and it also means that God is not telling the truth. God's trustworthiness relative to motives and God's truthfulness relative to facts are both impugned.¹⁵⁰ In addition, the account contains an

¹⁴⁷ As Bonhoeffer indicates (*Creation and Fall*, 69), the serpent has attacked the basic presupposition of human existence against which there is no other defence than to exclaim, "Ὁπαγε, Σατανᾶ."

¹⁴⁸ Skinner (*Genesis*, 69) and Westermann (*Genesis 1-11*, 239) affirm that the original command is intensified and made more stringent in the woman's answer.

¹⁴⁹ Moberly, "Serpent," 6.

¹⁵⁰ Moberly, "Serpent," 7.

element that aligns it with the poem about "the Shining One" in Isaiah. One recalls that "the Shining One" said in his heart, "I will make myself like the Most High" (Isa 14:14), and in Genesis the serpent says to the woman, "you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Gen 3:5).¹⁵¹ When the logic of the drama ripens toward a decision in her mind, the serpent remains silent, "leaving the fascination of sense to do the rest,"¹⁵² or more precisely, leaving the evidence to speak for itself since the facts on the ground appear to favour the serpent's position (Gen 3:6). The text leaves no doubt that the human decision with respect to God's command reflects acceptance of the serpent's picture of God. She "took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate" (Gen 3:6).

Conclusion

The story line in the middle of Revelation (12:1-17), as at the ending (20:1-10), gives "the ancient serpent" a central role in the narrative. This role is greatly substantiated by paying attention to the characters and the plot in the Old Testament allusions that lie behind the theme of cosmic conflict in Revelation. Allusions to the poem concerning the fall of "the Shining One" in Isaiah and to the temptation story in Genesis go a long way toward explaining the importance of this being to Revelation's own narrative. The respectful reading of the plot that belongs to these allusions in their original context, as has been attempted here, concludes that these texts shed light on the plot in Revelation.

The poems in Isaiah and Ezekiel tell of an angelic being whose exceptional qualities convince him that he is deserving of higher office, even to supplant God. In Genesis, the plot begins with a question raised against the quality of God's government,

¹⁵¹ Knowing 'good and evil' should be understood as a metaphor for knowing everything, framing a criterion for what it means to be like God.

¹⁵² Skinner, *Genesis*, 75.

casting doubt on God's motives and impugning God's fundamental character. The qualities of "the Shining One" are sufficient warrant for his aspiration to be like the Most High in his own eyes, but they are deemed inadequate for the task of convincing others. Consequently, the thrust of his effort to persuade others relies on misrepresentation and innuendo with respect to God (Gen 3:1).

It cannot be emphasized too strongly that according to the present interpretation, Old Testament poems and narratives heavy with plot in their own native context bring that consignment undiminished to Revelation. The Genesis account of the fall stands as the most telling case in point, leaving human beings in a predicament where, as one sensitive observer sees it, "statement stands against statement."¹⁵³ This indicates a dilemma that cannot be resolved by mere claims, especially since the serpent's version is made to appear like the one that conforms best with the way things are (Gen 3:6a).

The plot suggested by the allusions in Revelation resounds with the premise of the book's stated objective to 'remove the lid,' so to speak. The unveiling promised in the opening phrase (1:1) takes for granted that something is veiled, not resolved, and still mysterious. What is more, Revelation frames its message in the claim that it concerns "what *must* take place" (1:1; 22:6), extending the notion of necessity all through the book, and consigning all to the grand revelatory purpose. So, too, as the present inquiry moves further upstream, heeding the call from above to be a witness to ὁ δὲ γενέσθαι μετὰ ταῦτα, "what must take place after this" (4:1).

¹⁵³ Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 71.

CHAPTER SIX

DISCERNING THE STORY LINE FROM THE BEGINNING: SETTING AND SEQUENCE

Introduction

Acceptance of the view that there is a subdivision in the middle of the prophetic portion of Revelation creates the need to reassess whether this break also signifies discontinuity in the narrative.¹ How does the story line before and after Revelation 12 connect, given the central role accorded to this chapter? In defending the presumption of unity and continuity, the present chapter will look at the close connection between the trumpet and bowl cycles, the allusions to “the Shining One” in the first part of Revelation (4:1-11:19), the ‘retroactive’ influence of the war-in-heaven theme, and the network of allusions throughout Revelation that speaks to the theme of cosmic conflict. It will also argue that the heavenly setting of the prophetic-apocalyptic narrative in the first part of Revelation is best appreciated in the light of the cosmic conflict that is explicit in the second part (12:1-20:15).

The Unity and Continuity of Revelation’s Narrative

Trumpet and Bowl Cycles

Numerous elements serve as indicators of continuity between the two ‘halves’ of Revelation. A striking first indicator in this respect is the repeated cycles of seven, two of which occur in the first half and one in the second. This pattern prioritizes the view that repetition in terms of structure signifies narrative and thematic continuity and thematic recapitulation, and it applies to all the three explicit cycles in this portion of

¹ The ‘main body’ refers to Rev 4:1-22:5, and the most important subdivision in this body begins at chapter 12; cf. Bornkamm, “Die Komposition,” 133-37; Yarbrow Collins, *Combat Myth*, 43. Both argue the case for recapitulation.

Revelation.² The close similarity in content between the trumpet cycle and the bowl cycle is one of the most specific and compelling features bolstering the case for narrative continuity in the two ‘halves’ of Revelation.³ While the differences between these two cycles should not be overlooked, the similarities contribute strongly to the impression that what precedes Revelation 12 and what follows it play out in the same territory within the story line.

	<u>Trumpets</u> (8:7-11:19)	<u>Bowls</u> (16:2-21)
1 st	Hail, fire, and blood fall on the <i>earth</i> .	The bowl is poured on the <i>earth</i> .
2 nd	A blazing mountain falls into the <i>sea</i> . One third of the sea becomes <i>blood</i> . A third of <i>sea creatures die</i> .	The bowl is poured on the <i>seas</i> . The seas become <i>blood</i> . Every living thing in them <i>dies</i> .
3 rd	A blazing star falls on a third of <i>rivers and fountains</i> .	The bowl is poured on <i>rivers and fountains</i> .
4 th	A third of <i>sun</i> , moon, and stars are struck, resulting in darkness.	The bowl is poured on the <i>sun</i> , resulting in suffering.
5 th	Shaft of the bottomless pit opened. Sun and air are <i>darkened</i> with smoke. Locusts appear to <i>torture</i> people who are unprotected by the seal of God.	The bowl is poured out on the throne of the beast, plunging it into <i>darkness</i> . People “ <i>gnawed their tongues in agony</i> .”
6 th	The four angels bound at <i>the great river Euphrates</i> are released. Cavalry numbering two hundred million kills a third of humanity.	The bowl is poured on <i>the great river Euphrates</i> . Kings of the world assemble for battle on the great day of God the Almighty in a place called Armageddon.
7 th	<i>Loud voices in heaven</i> announce the coming of the kingdom of God and Christ.	The bowl is poured into the air. <i>A loud voice from the throne</i> announces “It is done.”

² Including the setting of each cycle, the seven seals cover Rev 4:1-8:1, the seven trumpets Rev 8:2-11:19, and the seven bowls Rev 15:1-16:21. Since the one of the seven bowl angels explains the mystery of Babylon (17:1ff.) and the New Jerusalem (21:1ff.) the bowl cycle extends through the remainder of the book, excepting the epilogue.

³ A comparison based on the complete text in Greek is even more revealing. The present comparison is adapted from Beale (*Revelation*, 808-10).

The repetitive features in this comparison speak for themselves. In particular, the pointed mention of "the great river Euphrates,"⁴ introduced under the sixth trumpet and repeated again in a similar context and connotation under the sixth bowl, makes it difficult to doubt that this parallel is the product of careful authorial intention.⁵ The differences between the trumpet and the bowl cycles are chiefly of a kind that enhances the sense of progression in the retelling of the same story. At the blowing of the second trumpet only "a *third* of the sea became blood" and only "a *third* of the living creatures in the sea died" (8:9). As the second bowl is poured out, this judicious fractionation is abandoned as the bowl plagues leave a trail of destruction where nothing is spared. The force of the metaphor is unquestionably raised to a higher level when the author sees the sea become "like the blood of a corpse," and death striking "*every* living thing in the sea" (16:3). While the repetition suggests recapitulation, it also denotes progression in extent, intensification in quality, and a terminal sensation of finality.

Allusions to "the Shining One" in the First Part of Revelation

A major signifier of continuity between the first and the second half of Revelation relates specifically to the leader of the losing side in the cosmic conflict. When Satan in the end is left alone on stage, an angel comes down from heaven having "the key to the bottomless pit" (20:1). As noted previously, this crucial key is an important feature in connection with the fifth trumpet in the first half of Revelation (9:1). When the fifth

⁴ Designating Euphrates as "the *great* river" stems from the relation of this river to Babylon, repeatedly specified as "Babylon the great" in Revelation (14:8; 16:9; 17:5; 18:2, 10, 24). The most likely Old Testament source for this characterization is Dan 4:30. Beale (*Revelation*, 829) points out that *Targ.* Jeremiah 51:36, 41-44 equates the drying up of Babylon's 'sea,' i.e. the river, with loss of support from its subject peoples.

⁵ Cogent arguments have been offered for a striking alignment of the sixth element in each of the cycles with each other; cf. Andrew E. Steinmann, "The Tripartite Structure of the Sixth Seal, the Sixth Trumpet, and the Sixth Bowl of John's Apocalypse (Rev 6:12-7:17; 9:13-11-14; 16:12-16)," *JETS* 35 (1992), 69-79. This painstaking feature of Revelation's structure strongly favours the case for recapitulation.

angel blows his trumpet “the key to the shaft of the bottomless pit” is in the hands of the star “that had fallen from heaven to the earth” (9:1). This fallen star uses the key to open the bottomless pit with the result that smoke pours out from the abyss (9:2). The star, it must be remembered, has here been identified as *Hēlēl*, “the Shining One” in Isaiah’s depiction of the cosmic conflict (Isa 14:12).⁶ When the end comes in Revelation, however, the key is no longer in his hands. Instead, a heavenly being locks up the agent of darkness in the domain that was previously the arsenal of his power (20:3).

The scope of the narrative and the meticulously calibrated markers of continuity are hard to miss. In the trumpet sequence the agent is still seen and remembered as a fallen star, recalling his heavenly origin and the primordial aspect of the story that is told. In the sequence describing the binding of Satan, a residue of his original high standing can only be inferred from the curious note that after his imprisonment “he *must* be let out” (20:3). Where the trumpet sequence gives him a broad mandate – ἐδόθη αὐτῷ ἡ κλεῖς τοῦ φρέατος τῆς ἀβύσσου (9:1) – allowing him to implement his design on the world, the binding of Satan pictures a dramatic curtailment to his activity (20:3). The critical and distinctive point in this perception of the narrative is that before Revelation tells of the end of Satan, the reader is informed of the character of his activity, telling the story again and again from new and progressively revealing angles. In the trumpet sequence it is *his* activity that is depicted, in contrast to views that see the calamities accompanying the trumpets primarily as God’s judgments on human beings

⁶ Paulien (*Revelation’s Trumpets*, 270-71, 396) sees Isaiah 14:12 as only a possible allusion in the third trumpet, an unnecessarily modest conclusion given that the allusion seems to fulfil the stipulated criteria for a probable allusion on thematic and verbal grounds. Resisting the identification of the star with Lucifer or “the Shining One,” he finds it more appropriate “to identify the star with the leader or leaders of the church at the time of its decline” (*Revelation’s Trumpets*, 402-3). This interpretation allegorizes and emasculates the Old Testament metaphor and referent in the allusion, going after small fry while letting the big fish too easily off the hook.

who are disobedient.⁷ What may be construed as a judgment on Satan, then, does not come until the end and not until the repugnant and self-destructive character of Satan's programme has been fully disclosed (19:19-20:10). Even then the progression in view, from the unveiling of the demonic activity to its ultimate curtailment, does no more than deliver the first draft of the theologically significant message that the programme of "the Shining One" is bound to implode. Failing to identify and to heed the central role of the satanic agency in the calamities that are reported obscures the evidence on which the inevitable demise of Satan is based. Worse yet, it carries the risk that those who experience such calamities in real life and those who read about them in Revelation together make the tragic mistake of sending the bill to the wrong address.

⁷ There is wide agreement across a wide range of otherwise divergent presuppositions that the cycles of seven in Revelation describe God's judgments on human disobedience and rebellion. As to the trumpet sequence, Boring (*Revelation*, 134-35) is convinced that "all the plagues come from heaven," are not caused by independent powers, and proceed ultimately "from the sovereign hand of the one God." Schüssler Fiorenza (*Vision of a Just World*, 70) also emphasizes these calamities as examples of "how God executes wrath and judgment" in the interest of liberating his oppressed people. Noting how the water turns bitter under the third trumpet, Roloff (*Revelation*, 111) sees divine agency and judgment on human disobedience "when God poisons the water and thereby destroys the place where these people live." Bauckham (*Climax of Prophecy*, 204) notes progression in the severity of the judgments until "the limited warning judgments of the trumpets give place to the seven last plagues of God's wrath on the finally unrepentant." To Aune (*Revelation 6-16*, 545), recalling as do others the underlying motif of Israel's deliverance from Egypt, the purpose of the trumpet plagues specifically "is not to elicit repentance but to exact punishment." In his view this trend has already been set in motion since the events in the seal sequence also signify divine judgment; cf. Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 434. According to Hans K. LaRondelle (*The End-Time Prophecies of the Bible* [Sarasota: First Impressions, 1997], 115), the contents of the sealed scroll describe "the judgments of God on a hostile world." The cycles of seven cover the same ground; "the apocalyptic seals, and by extension the trumpets and bowls, are all to be understood as *Messianic judgments*" (p. 123), and "the literary resemblance of the trumpets with Egypt's plagues tells us that the trumpets are in essence not natural disasters or general calamities, but God's covenant curses on His enemies" (pp. 175-6). Beale (*Revelation*, 467), also drawing a straight line from the plagues in Exodus (Ex 7-12) to Revelation and firmly committed to the thesis of divine agency, writes that "the trumpets must ultimately be understood as punishments that further harden the majority of people. The trumpets are not intended to coerce unbelieving idolaters into repentance but primarily to demonstrate to them God's uniqueness and incomparable omnipotence." Sovereignty, omnipotence, and judgment are likewise key ingredients in Osborne's understanding of the cycles of seven. Thus, in the trumpet sequence, "God wants to make his omnipotence known to the world and to show the futility of turning against him" (cf. Osborne, *Revelation*, 357). The present interpretation faults all of the above views for insufficiently heeding the theme of cosmic conflict in Revelation, specifically for their indifference to the nature of Satan's programme.

The Retroactive Influence of War-in-heaven Theme

At the centre of this view of the narrative lies the war-in-heaven theme (12:7-9), now exerting its influence as much on the story that precedes its explicit mention as on the part that follows. The consistent designation of the losing protagonist as “the ancient serpent” in the last half of the book (12:9; 20:2) facilitates the task of keeping track of his role in that part of the narrative, but the presence of this agent may not be any less conspicuous in the first half of the book. Having noted the connection between the fallen star in the trumpet sequence and the final binding of Satan (9:1; 20:3), a similar link applies to the combat theme in Revelation 12. In connection with the third trumpet John reports that “*a great star fell* from heaven, blazing like a torch” (8:10). Again, under the fifth trumpet, he “saw *a star* that had fallen from heaven to earth” (9:1).⁸ This description indicates a stable metaphor and an unwavering theme internal to Revelation. In the primordial glimpse of the action of this character, John observed that “his tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth” (12:4). Later in the story the ‘stars’ are identified as angels, and they suffer the same fate as their leader when they, like their leader, are “thrown down with him” (12:9).

A special note is warranted with respect to the remark that the tail of the dragon “swept down *a third* of the stars of heaven” (12:4) because this is not the only instance that this fraction is specified.⁹ With the objective of establishing narrative continuity, this expression should be aligned with the abundant and repetitive use of this numerical entity in connection with the calamities taking place under five of the seven trumpets. On first impression these ‘thirds’ simply conform to conventional usage, denoting a

⁸ Boring (*Revelation*, 136-7) sees a connection between the “Luminous” in Isa 14:12 and the fallen star in Revelation’s trumpet sequence but treats it mostly as mythological background noise; cf. also Caird, *Revelation*, 114-15; Sweet, *Revelation*, 163; Beale, *Revelation*, 479.

⁹ The trumpet cycle refers to *a third* fourteen times in all (8:7-9:18).

fraction of the whole.¹⁰ Consequently, “a third of the stars of heaven” (12:4) signify that some but not all of the angels fell, and “a third of the earth” (8:7) means that a portion of the earth but not all of it was struck by the calamity.¹¹ In support of this comes the observation that the bowls that follow the trumpets so closely in sequence and content strike the whole and not only a part, bolstering the argument that the recapitulation in view also involves progression and intensification.

But the insistent and almost annoying monotony of this term suggests that its use in a strict fractional sense does not exhaust its meaning.¹²

First trumpet:	“ <i>a third</i> of the earth... <i>a third</i> of the trees” (8:7)
Second trumpet:	“ <i>a third</i> of the sea... <i>a third</i> of the living creatures... <i>a third</i> of the ships” (8:8)
Third trumpet:	“ <i>a third</i> of the waters” (8:10)
Fourth trumpet:	“ <i>a third</i> of the sun... <i>a third</i> of the moon... <i>a third</i> of the stars... <i>a third</i> of their light... <i>a third</i> of the day ...and likewise the night” (8:12)
Sixth trumpet:	“ <i>a third</i> of humankind... <i>a third</i> of humankind” (9:15, 18)

The ‘thirds’ specified in the trumpet sequence are in fact subsequent and consequent to the original and primordial ‘third’ that is reported in the vision of the dragon, whose “tail swept down a *third* of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth” (12: 4). A numerical aspect may indeed be in view, but a strict fractional application fails to do justice to John’s rather awkward fractionations here and in the trumpet sequence. When the influence of Revelation 12 is felt on prior passages in Revelation, the thrust of the recurring “third” suggests a sense that will not be a

¹⁰ Charles (*Revelation* I, 233) finds a possible parallel in Zech 13:8, where “two-thirds shall be cut off and perish, and one-third shall be left alive.” Beale (*Revelation*, 473-74) supports the notion of limitation, attributing this to the influence of Ezek 5:2, 12.

¹¹ Cf. Aune, *Revelation* 6-16, 546; Resseguie, *Revelation Unsealed*, 180.

¹² Paulien’s suggestion (*Revelation’s Trumpets*, 369) that the “thirds” may be “part of a larger construct” in Revelation seems well advised, but he tends to see the larger construct as God’s judgment on Satan rather than as satanic agency.

reference to quantity, in answer to questions probing for 'what' or 'where' or 'how much.' It must also be seen as a qualitative reference, an answer to the question, 'who?' With an eye on the beginning, the 'thirds' under the trumpets serve as a signifier of agency and therefore as a telltale sign of demonic activity. The revelator perceives in these 'thirds' the fingerprint of Satan on all the instances of disaster and suffering that he catalogues, and he purposes to feature them by invoking the original satanic trademark, whose tail swept down "*a third* of the stars of heaven" (12:4). Jacques Ellul's imaginative and idiosyncratic interpretation of Revelation is on to something when he claims that "it is indeed the action of these Satanic powers that in every circumstance provokes death in the Apocalypse, and not at all, never directly, the action of God upon men."¹³ Instead, all these 'thirds,' primordially (12:4) and at the blowing of the trumpets (8:7-9:18), become something of a trademark of the opposing side in the cosmic conflict.

This interpretation correlates well with the language describing the calamities announced by the trumpets. With each trumpet the metaphors and images become increasingly bizarre, overdrawn, and deliberately hyperbolic.¹⁴ Nature has no counterpart to what is described precisely in order to highlight the demonic nature of the suffering inflicted and the agency that stands behind it.

¹³ Ellul, *Apocalypse*, 65. This book may be deficient in its appreciation for the Old Testament background of Revelation's imagery, but interpretations thus aware tend to underestimate the transforming impact of Revelation's dualistic world view on its Old Testament imagery.

¹⁴ When it comes to verify the demonic character of what transpires in connection with the trumpets, seeing is believing. The fifth trumpet features locusts that look like horses with tails like scorpions; "their faces were like human faces, their hair like women's hair, and their teeth like lions' teeth" (9:7-10). Upon the blowing of the sixth trumpet John again sees horses with composite, demonic features; "the riders wore breastplates the color of fire and of sapphire and of sulfur; the heads of the horses were like lions' heads, and fire and smoke and sulfur came out of their mouths" (9:17).

The Network of Allusions Reflecting the Theme of Cosmic Conflict

Perhaps the weightiest indicator of unity and continuity in Revelation's narrative, therefore, is the allusive substrate that underlies the entire composition. Allusiveness, it is noted, presupposes familiarity with the prior text with the paradoxical result that less rather than more needs to be said for the older text to inform the new message.

Widespread diffusion of allusions to a specific text or body of texts gives further weight to the importance of the older text and its role in shaping the new composition.

Bauckham's general proposition that the author of Revelation builds meaning "by a network of allusion to the same Old Testament passage in various parts of the Apocalypse"¹⁵ is amply confirmed by the playing room given to the poem describing the fall of "the Shining One" (Isa 14:12-20) and to the closely related poem about the "covering cherub" (Ezek 28:11-19) throughout Revelation. A number of instances have already been mentioned where these texts are featured. Since the present interpretation takes the theme of cosmic conflict as the groundwork for the story line of Revelation, the following six-point review of allusive occurrences of these texts is intended to highlight their function with respect to the theme and narrative unity of Revelation.

1. *The Star of the Third Trumpet (8:10)*

καὶ ἔπεσεν ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ἀστὴρ μέγας καίόμενος ὡς λαμπάς (Rev 8:10).

πῶς ἐξέπεσεν ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ὁ ἑωσφόρος ὁ πρῶτὸ ἀνατέλλων (Isa 14:12).

Here the action in Revelation follows the verb chosen by the Septuagint translators, and the subject of the action, "the great blazing star," corresponds to "the shining one" and his fall from heaven in Isaiah.¹⁶

¹⁵ Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, xi.

¹⁶ In Fekkes' study (*Isaiah in Revelation*, 280) Isa 14:12 does not make the category of certain allusions or even the category of probable or possible allusions as to the background for Rev 8:10. Aune

2. The Star of the Fifth Trumpet (9:1)

καὶ εἶδον ἀστέρα ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ πεπτωκότα εἰς τὴν γῆν (Rev 9:1).

πῶς ἐξέπεσεν ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ὁ ἑωσφόρος ὁ πρῶτὸς ἀνατέλλων συνετρίβη εἰς τὴν γῆν (Isa 14:12).

The wording of describing the star in connection with the fifth trumpet is so similar to the subject under the third trumpet as to indicate repetition and recapitulation within the trumpet cycle itself. The initial verbal action under the third trumpet – “a great star *fell*” (ἐπέσεν ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ἀστὴρ μέγας) – lies close to “a star that *had fallen*” (ἀστέρα ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ πεπτωκότα) under the fifth trumpet, and the difference in verbal form indicates that John is witness to a progression in the activity of the same agent.¹⁷ Even if Charles were correct that the use of the perfect participle should not to be taken as a direct reference to a fallen angel,¹⁸ the verbal action modifies ἀστέρα, “star,” and it describes the result of the action to the one seeing it. “John does not say that he actually *saw* the star fall,” writes Aune, “he says only that he saw the star *after* it had fallen.”¹⁹ To Beale, “the nuance of the perfect tense πεπτωκότα (‘had fallen’) is that John did not see the star fall but saw it after it had fallen and identifies it as such.”²⁰ These observations tend to neutralize Charles’ objection since the end result is a star that has fallen. Louis A. Brighton contends, as does the present interpretation,

(*Revelation 6-16*, 521) explores a number of possible extra-biblical parallels but shies away from the one Old Testament text that matches the wording and the theme in Revelation. Beale (*Revelation*, 479) is more interested in the actions that follow in wake of the falling of the star than in the star itself, seeing these as God’s judgments, but he nevertheless sees an allusion to Isa 14:12-15. His theological interpretation of the trumpets leaves little room for the fallen star as the agent of destruction.

¹⁷ Beale (*Revelation*, 492) draws a line between this text and the expulsion of Satan in Rev 12:9 but omits any reference to Isaiah for this text.

¹⁸ Charles, *Revelation I*, 238. Charles is at a loss to establish the identity of the star in question.

¹⁹ Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 525.

²⁰ Beale, *Revelation*, 491.

that “[t]he identity of this star is unmistakable, for it is the same personality that is embodied by the dragon in 12:3 and who is identified as the devil and Satan (12:9).”²¹ In addition, if Mounce is correct that the perfect participle describing the action is to be seen as “a dramatic perfect,”²² it sharpens the momentous character of the event and the impact on the one seeing it. Most important in the present context, however, is the likelihood that the poem in Isaiah about the fall of “the Shining One” again is in view.

3. *The Name of the Agent Causing Destruction under the Fifth Trumpet (9:11)*

ἔχουσιν ἐπ’ αὐτῶν βασιλέα τὸν ἄγγελον τῆς ἀβύσσου, ὄνομα αὐτῷ
 Ἑβραϊστὶ Ἀβαδδὼν, καὶ ἐν τῇ Ἑλληνικῇ ὄνομα ἔχει Ἀπολλύων
 (Rev 9:11).

διότι τὴν γῆν μου ἀπώλεσας καὶ τὸν λαόν μου ἀπέκτεινας (Isa 14:20).

Under the fifth trumpet the name of the agent behind the destruction occurring on earth is publicized in two languages and in bold print. “They have as king over them the angel of the bottomless pit; his name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in Greek he is called Apollyon” (9:11).²³ Confusion as to whether this description actually applies to the fallen star itself, seeing the event from the vantage point of its earthly consequences, comes closer to a resolution if the entire poem in Isaiah is allowed to speak to the text. Both of the names in Revelation mean “Destroyer,” the Greek forming a name of the verb ἀπολλύναι, “to destroy.” But this expression merely echoes Isaiah’s prophecy about the downfall of “the Shining One,” whose fall was the subject at the beginning of the fifth trumpet. Here the agent of destruction is given a name corresponding to the

²¹ Louis A. Brighton, *Revelation* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1999), 235-36..

²² Mounce, *Revelation*, 192.

²³ Beale (*Revelation*, 503) holds that the “Destroyer” in this verse “is either the devil himself or an evil representative of the devil.

action envisioned by the poem, “You have destroyed your land, you have killed your people” (Isa 14:20).²⁴

4. The War-in-heaven at the Centre of Revelation (12:7-9)

Καὶ ἐγένετο πόλεμος ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ... καὶ ἐβλήθη ὁ δράκων ὁ μέγας, ὁ ὄφιν ὁ ἀρχαῖος, ὁ καλούμενος Διάβολος καὶ ὁ Σατανᾶς, ὁ πλανῶν τὴν οἰκουμένην ὅλην, ἐβλήθη εἰς τὴν γῆν (Rev 12:7.9)

πῶς ἐξέπεσεν ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ὁ ἑωσφόρος ὁ πρῶτὸ ἀνατέλλων συνετρίβη εἰς τὴν γῆν (Isa 14:12).

Here it must suffice to refer back to the arguments presented in support of this parallel earlier in the two previous chapters. The importance of these texts to the interpretation of Revelation is on the one hand that they picture a conflict that begins in heaven, and on the other hand that Isaiah’s poem envisions an antagonist who is originally known as “the Shining One” and not as Satan.

5. The Binding and Release of Satan (20:1-10)

καὶ ἔβαλεν αὐτὸν εἰς τὴν ἄβυσσον (Rev 20:3).

νῦν δὲ εἰς ἄδου καταβήσῃ καὶ εἰς τὰ θεμέλια τῆς γῆς (Isa 14:15).

The internal coherence in Revelation is evident as the narrative progresses to reveal that the one who was thrown “to the earth” (12:9) in the end is confined in “the bottomless pit” (20:3, NKJV).²⁵ The poem in Isaiah envisions a similar fate for the fallen “Shining One.”

6. The Description of Jesus as “the Morning Star” (22:16)

ἐγὼ εἰμι ... ὁ ἀστὴρ ὁ λαμπρὸς ὁ πρωϊνός (Rev 22:16).

²⁴ As noted, the Septuagint has “my land” where the Hebrew text has “your land” (Isa 14:20).

²⁵ Cf. Sverre Bøe, *Gog and Magog: Ezekiel 38-39 as pre-text for Revelation 19,17-21 and 20,7-10* (WUNT 2.135; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 255.

ὁ ἑωσφόρος ὁ πρωὶ ἀνατέλλων (Isa 14:12).

When in this “I am” saying Jesus refers to himself as “the bright morning star” (22:16), it resonates with the theme of the cosmic conflict and recalls the fall and undoing of his leading opponent. The echoing surface of this allusion enlarges when like-sounding and equally emphatic statements are enlisted. Jesus is also ὁ μάρτυς ὁ πιστός (1:5)²⁶ and even ὁ μάρτυς ὁ πιστὸς καὶ ἀληθινός, ἡ ἀρχὴ τῆς κτίσεως τοῦ θεοῦ (3:14). He is portrayed as the faithful and reliable witness in Revelation’s unveiling of the truth about God, in pointed contrast to the malicious and slanderous deceit that came to be the hallmark of his opponent, and indeed, his very name (12:9; 20:2).

The foregoing six-point overview does not exhaust the list of Old Testament allusions to the cosmic conflict in Revelation,²⁷ but it suffices for the purpose of showing wide diffusion of relatively few texts. Most important, the substructure of this theme in Revelation appropriates the poem of the fall of “the Shining One” (Isa 14:12-20) as a stable allusive constituent throughout the book. This, too, supports the case for seeing Revelation as a unified composition while affirming a new beginning and claiming a special role for Revelation 12. Narrative continuation and thematic recapitulation are both evident when the trumpet cycle (8:7-11:19) is laid out next to the bowl cycle (16:2-21). The theme of cosmic conflict that dominates the second half of

²⁶ Beale (*Revelation*, 192) notes Ps 89:37 as the source of Jesus’ designation as ὁ μάρτυς ὁ πιστός. Significantly, this expression is found in a Psalm that affirms the worship and vindication of God “in the assembly of the holy ones” (89:5), setting God apart from the *b^ene ʾelohim* (89:6). Psalm 89, especially vv. 6-9, has the theme of cosmic conflict as an underlying assumption; cf. Morgenstern, “Psalm 82,” 66.

²⁷ Other candidate texts are the reference to the downfall of the angels in Rev 12:4, also echoing Isa 14:12; the jewels in the foundation of the New Jerusalem (Rev 21:19-20), strongly reminiscent of Ezek 28:13; and even the possibility that the decisive ‘battle of Armageddon’ (Rev 16:16) is yet another echo of Isa 14:13, leaving in play the view of Charles C. Torrey (“Armageddon,” *HTR* 31 [1938], 237-489) and others of a still unresolved issue.

the book, then, is just as pervasive in the first half. The next task is to investigate how these conclusions affect the narrative at its beginning.²⁸

The Heavenly Setting of the Prophetic-Apocalyptic Narrative

The part designated as the beginning of the prophetic-apocalyptic narrative covers the opening of the book with the seven seals (4:1-8:1). Crucial elements in this cycle are the heavenly setting (4:1), the sealed scroll (5:1), the distress caused by the difficulty of finding one who is qualified to open the scroll (5:2-4), the appearance of the slaughtered Lamb (5:6), the acclaim of heavenly beings (4:8-11; 5:9-14), and the mysterious silence in heaven at the breaking of the seventh seal (8:1). Only the setting will be explored in this chapter.

The Throne-Room Setting

The sequence begins with a call to enter the heavenly realm.

After this I looked, and there in heaven a door stood open! And the first voice, which I had heard speaking to me like a trumpet, said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this." At once I was in the spirit, and there in heaven stood a throne, with one seated on the throne!

Rev 4:1, 2

The change of setting that begins with this ascent to the heavenly throne room (4:1) is so marked that most interpreters see it as the major division in the book, setting apart the messages to the seven churches (1:9-3:22) from what may be called the prophetic or the apocalyptic narrative (4:1-22:5).²⁹ From the point of view of the unity of the text, the new venue spans the rest of the book except for the epilogue.³⁰

²⁸ A detailed comparison of the seven seals and the seven trumpets will not be pursued. Since the 'seal cycle' is introduced in Rev 4:1, this section (4:1-8:1) will be treated as an indivisible whole.

²⁹ Most in-depth structural analyses favour this division one way or another; cf. Vanni, *La struttura letteraria dell'Apocalisse*, 173; 182-254; Lambrecht, "Structuration," 77; Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, c-cv; Beale, *Revelation*, 317. According to Kraft (*Offenbarung*, 103), the real beginning of Revelation starts with chapter 4.

In the normal narrative sequence, the shift that occurs with the heavenly ascent "in the spirit" (4:2) marks an abrupt transition from the earthly state of the seven churches and their circumstances to a very different heavenly reality. The importance of this dramatic translocation is not lost on interpreters. Decisions with respect to the 'why' of the visionary transfer materially affect the interpretation of the rest of the book.

On one level the ascent to heaven may be seen as merely a generic feature of an apocalyptic composition. Basic to this view of the apocalyptic genre is the notion that direct access to the heavenly realm should be seen as a *sine qua non* of apocalyptic literature.³¹ This criterion for the genre is fulfilled by the book of Revelation, but its sensitivity as a marker of genre is greater than its specificity. Books not generally classified as apocalyptic also describe direct access to the immediate presence of God, including prophetic books that are important sources of allusions in Revelation.³² In view of the generic ambiguity of Revelation the heavenly ascent in vision into God's

³⁰ The anarthrous reference to the throne in Rev 4:2 (καὶ ἰδοὺ θρόνος ἔκειτο ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ) signifies the first mention of the throne in narrational, conceptual, and thematic terms from the point of view of the author even though he has referred to the throne *with* the article in Rev 1:4 and 3:21. As the text stands, this feature indicates that (1) appropriation of the parts of Revelation's narrative depends on appropriation of the whole and not only *vice versa*; (2) a linear reading of Revelation is inadequate, a point that is also emphasized with respect to the influence of the war-in-heaven theme on the whole of Revelation; (3) the use of the article before the throne in Rev 1:4 and 3:21 may be seen as anaphoric in the sense that it anticipates the anarthrous introduction to the important throne imagery in Rev 4:2; (4) priority must be given to the disclosure that begins in the throne room setting over the messages to the seven churches in terms of sounding the theme for the entire book. Boring (*Revelation*, 102) makes the transition to the heavenly throne room "the theological fountainhead and anchor point for the whole document." To Roloff (*Revelation*, 68), this change of scene is to be taken as "the point of departure and reference for all that follows." It is of particular significance for the present interpretation that Roloff singles out Rev 12-13 and Rev 21-22 as additional evidence for his contention that the heavenly throne room marks the theological centre of the book.

³¹ Cf. Rowland, *Open Heaven*, 10, 71-78.

³² An important vision of the heavenly throne room from the perspective of Rev 4 is found in Isaiah's vision of God on his throne (Isa 6:1). The visions of Ezekiel are also important to Revelation (cf. Ezek 1:1ff.), and the vision reported by Micaiah son of Imlah also belongs in this category although its literary setting hardly qualifies as apocalyptic (1 Kings 22:19). In the New Testament Paul claims to be the intimate of a visionary experience and even a heavenly ascent that by some criteria would belong to the rubric of apocalyptic even though the literary setting is not (2 Cor 12:1-4).

presence may not be fully accounted for merely by looking to books that fit the criteria for the apocalyptic genre less ambiguously. Moreover, even when the generic question is held in the foreground, the interpreter must still grapple with the substantive issue of what is disclosed in the course of the visionary experience. Rowland's emphasis "on the revelation of things *as they actually are* in the heavenly world" is a succinct case in point.³³ This leads to the question, What exactly does the privileged view into the heavenly realm reveal in Revelation?

Charles answered this question before the subject was framed within the parameters of contemporary definitions of apocalyptic literature, setting words to the transition with a degree of specificity and with a redolent force that remain unsurpassed. Since the answer given on this point is decisive for any reading of Revelation, his interpretation bears quoting in full,

With chapter iv. there is an entire change of scene and subject. The dramatic contrast could not be greater. Hitherto the scene of the Seer's visions had been earth: now it is heaven. On the one hand, in ii-iii. we have had a vivid description of the Christian Churches in Asia Minor, – which is to be taken as typical of the Church at large, – the ideals they cherished, their faulty achievements and not infrequent disloyalties, and their outlook darkened in every instance with the apprehension of universal persecution and martyrdom. But the moment we leave the restlessness, the troubles, the imperfectness, and apprehension pervading ii-iii., we pass at once in iv. into an atmosphere of perfect assurance and peace. Not even the faintest echo is heard here of the alarms and fears of the faithful, nor do the unmeasured claims and wrongdoings of the supreme and imperial power on earth wake even a moment's misgiving in the trust and adoration of the heavenly hosts. An infinite harmony of righteousness and power prevails, while the greatest angelic orders proclaim before the throne the holiness of Him who sits thereon, who is the Almighty and from everlasting to everlasting, and to whose sovereign will the world and all that is therein owes and has owed its being.³⁴

³³ Christopher Rowland, "The Visions of God in Apocalyptic Literature," *JSJ* 10 (1979), 138.

³⁴ Charles, *Revelation* I, 102-3. On this point Charles' view commands wide support. Ford (*Revelation*, 87) emphasizes "the contrast between the harmony which is found in heaven, as represented by the worship of the living creatures, elders, angels, and creation, and the earthly disharmony and cosmic catastrophes which will be revealed in the rest of the apocalypse." Rowland (*Open Heaven*, 425) describes the contrast between the earthly and the heavenly reality in more subdued and prosaic terms than Charles, but the basic affirmation has the same ring to it: "The contrast between the hymns of praise to the all-powerful God in heaven and the lack of evidence of the divine will on earth must have been most evident to the readers of the apocalypse. The antithesis between theological affirmation and

The awe-inspiring scene and the enraptured reaction of interpreters appear to support this understanding. The removal from earth to heaven is assumed to be significant, and the purpose is taken to be immediately apparent. Amid the din and noise of earthly oppression the exiled believer is to find a measure of relief in a view of the peace and harmony of heaven. The sense of human powerlessness, battered by perils on all sides, is attenuated in the light of the omnipotent power of God and the glory of the unseen world. Polar opposites are brought to bear on faith that is tested to the limit in the shift from earth to heaven and still more in the striking contrast between earthly commotion and heavenly calm.

Reading Revelation linearly from start to finish is unlikely to raise doubts about the adequacy of this interpretation.³⁵ If the reality of the war in heaven is allowed to influence the interpretation of the beginning of the book, however, the impact of the transition into the heavenly throne room could be quite different. In that case John is not invited to ascend into heaven primarily in order to escape strife and oppression on the earth. It is the other way around: Earthly strife is not contrasted with heavenly peace but is rather to be viewed from the perspective of heavenly turmoil. Conditions on earth can only be understood in the light of the war that began in heaven. *The premise for the entire presentation that compasses the main body of Revelation (4:1-22:5) will then be the conflict that began in heaven, and the presumption of controversy underlies the actions in the heavenly council as well as the understanding of what happens on earth.* Yarbro Collins therefore seems profoundly correct when she writes

historical reality could not have been more starkly put." Resseguie (*Revelation Unsealed*, 175) takes the overwhelming primary effect to be that "order and coherence rules the universe."

³⁵ This acquiescence need not be seen as a necessity but is based on the fact that relatively few interpretations treat Satan as anything more than a stock character in Revelation. A potential corrective was suggested at the beginning of this chapter, noting the puzzlement of many interpreters over the binding and subsequent release of Satan (Rev 20:1-10).

that "in the context of the Apocalypse as a whole it is clear that the problem facing the heavenly council is the rebellion of Satan which is paralleled by rebellion on earth."³⁶

What transpires in the initial scene in the heavenly throne room supplies four subtle and tantalizing pieces of evidence that strengthen the legitimacy of Yarbro Collins' supposition. The first of these relates to the throne itself which occupies a dominant role Revelation, being referred to no less than forty times.³⁷ The force of the throne metaphor is further enhanced by the fact that its use in Revelation is not static. When Satan himself is no more (20:1-10), only the throne and its legitimate occupant are left in the picture.³⁸ To highlight the vindication of the One sitting on it, the throne takes on a stupendous magnitude, and the fabric of the universe dissolves as if to leave no competing point of reference. John sees "a great white throne and the one who sat on it; the earth and the heaven fled from his presence, and no place was found for them" (20:11). According to the war-in-heaven theme the throne of God is contested territory not only in the sense that the reader of Revelation must contend with claimants of earthly sovereignty in the form of Roman emperors who make demands on his life and loyalty. John's vision of the throne and of the One who sits on the throne recalls the initiation of the conflict and the ambition expressed in the neglected passage in Isaiah,

³⁶ Yarbro Collins (*Apocalypse*, 39) makes this statement with respect to the mystery of the sealed scroll in Revelation 5, but it should be extended to include chapter 4 since that is the proper beginning for the drama described in chapter 5. Her conclusion is based on paying attention to structural and narrational aspects of Revelation, allowing the combat theme that is explicit in Revelation 12 to influence the interpretation of the whole book. Despite the consistency with which she maintains this insight, it ends up mostly as mythological background noise in her own interpretation because her main point of reference is the historical foreground in John's time and not the biblical narrative with which Revelation is in constant dialogue.

³⁷ The throne metaphor is dominant with reference God, frequently referred to by the circumlocutionary phrase "the One who sits on the throne." But there are also thrones for the twenty-four elders (4:4; 11:16), thrones for those participating in judgment (20:4), and the throne of Satan or his accomplice (2:13; 13:2; 16:10). Significantly, the prominence of throne imagery leads Ford (*Revelation*, 76) to conclude that "the main theme of the work is theocracy versus dominion of Satan."

³⁸ Caird (*Revelation*, 62) writes that "the final reality which will still be standing when heaven and earth have disappeared is the great white throne" (20:11).

You said in your heart,
 "I will ascend to heaven;
 I will raise *my throne* above the stars of God;
 I *will sit enthroned* on the mount of assembly,
 on the utmost height of the sacred mountain.
 I will ascend above the tops of the clouds;
 I will make myself like the Most High."

Isa 14:13-14, NIV, emphasis added

Second, John's description of the throne, its visual impact, and the precious stones found in the immediate setting (Rev 4:3.5-6) recall the setting of Ezekiel's inaugural vision (Ezek 1:26-27), but this depiction also conjures up the context of Ezekiel's poem about the "covering cherub" (Ezek 28:11-19).³⁹ The importance of this connotation to the reading of Revelation is not only that John has an experience of the throne room like that of Ezekiel and thus wraps himself in the mantle of the Old Testament prophet. In the light of the war-in-heaven theme and the conflict seeking a resolution in Revelation, the setting becomes a reference point for the story line in Revelation and a telling reminder of where the conflict began.

The text nudges the reader not to disparage the setting and the spatial perspective by a third element in the throne room narrative. John sees "four living creatures, full of eyes in front and behind," and he strives to locate them with a high degree of precision ἐν μέσῳ τοῦ θρόνου καὶ κύκλῳ τοῦ θρόνου (4:6). As proof that the phrase is more than an accident, it comes up again when the next chapter introduces the figure of the lamb into the throne room scene. John sees the lamb standing ἐν μέσῳ τοῦ θρόνου καὶ τῶν τεσσάρων ζώων καὶ ἐν μέσῳ τῶν πρεσβυτέρων (5:6). Where exactly is this "middle" that John seeks to represent by these terms, recognizing the awkward construction?

³⁹ In Rev 4:3 the one sitting on the throne resembles ὁμοίος ὁράσει λίθῳ ἰάσπιδι καὶ σαρδίῳ, and the rainbow around the throne is ὁμοίος ὁράσει σμαραγδίνῳ. In Ezek 28:13 the first three stones according to the LXX are σάρδιον καὶ τοπάζιον καὶ σμαράγδον; cf. Mounce, *Revelation*, 134; Beale, *Revelation*, 320.

Charles, lacking neither courage nor ingenuity, finds the phrase ἐν μέσῳ τοῦ θρόνου completely unintelligible, dismissing it either as a gloss or as a mistranslation of a Hebrew antecedent.⁴⁰ Interpreters who are more reluctant to solve difficulties by surgical excision seek ways to make this expression conform to various imaginary constructions either of the throne room⁴¹ or of the throne itself.⁴² Despairing of a definite corollary to the conceptual precision suggested by the phrase, Aune nevertheless opts for the literal “in the midst of the throne and around the throne,”⁴³ but he adds that that this cannot mean on the throne itself but must only refer to its immediate vicinity.⁴⁴ Mounce likewise prefers “in the immediate vicinity of,”⁴⁵ admitting that it falls short of the connotation conveyed by the author, and Beale settles for the wording “around the immediate vicinity of the throne,” apparently with less qualms as to its adequacy.⁴⁶ These proposed solutions amounts to *de facto* deletions of the phrase ἐν μέσῳ τοῦ θρόνου, making it virtually redundant in terms of adding to the meaning conveyed by κύκλῳ τοῦ θρόνου alone.

⁴⁰ Charles, *Revelation* I, 118-19.

⁴¹ Raymond R. Brewer (“Revelation 4:6 and Translations Thereof,” *JBL* 71 [1952], 227-31) suggests that the stage of the Greek theatre is the setting that explains John’s terminology, envisioning an elevation on stage corresponding to the throne of God. Kraft (*Offenbarung*, 98), noting the impossibility and self-contradiction of something being “in the midst of the throne” and “around the throne,” seeks to solve the dilemma by giving the ‘throne’ a double meaning: It is the seat of honour for the heavenly Majesty, and it may also refer to heaven itself.

⁴² Robert G. Hall (“Living Creatures in the Midst of the Throne: Another Look at Revelation 4.6,” *NTS* 36 [1990], 609-13) finds the throne intimately related to the ark and sees on the basis of ark imagery the four living creatures as integral to the throne as the back, arms and legs of a chair at one and the same time belong to the chair and surround the chair. By his own admission this solution does not work for Rev 5:8 when the four living creatures fall down before the lamb. Darrell D. Hannah (“Of Cherubim and the Divine Throne: Rev 5:6 in Context,” *NTS* 49 [2003], 528-42) supports Hall’s conclusions, arguing that that the Lamb is on the throne and at its centre and not in some other relationship to it.

⁴³ Aune, *Revelation* 1-5, 269.

⁴⁴ Aune, *Revelation* 1-5, 272.

⁴⁵ Mounce, *Revelation*, 137.

⁴⁶ Beale, *Revelation*, 350.

There is little risk involved in maintaining that John seeks to recapture the connotation of an important biblical metaphor and that his aspiration in this respect is not fully matched by the translations noted so far. Since the description of the four living creatures derives from the throne room vision of Ezekiel (Ezek 1:4-28),⁴⁷ the imagery of this chapter may yield additional insights. One possibility is that the entire setting is to be framed within the ancient perception of the 'middle,' perceived as the mountain of God and the very centre of the cosmos.⁴⁸ Stephen G. Brown claims that the term 'middle' (μέσος) is important in itself, representing "an archetypal symbol referring to a sacred center, a place where earth and heaven met originally."⁴⁹ When Ezekiel in the introductory vision sees "a great cloud with brightness around it and fire flashing forth continually, and in the middle of the fire, something like gleaming amber" (Ezek 1:4), the scene is in itself a view of the 'middle,' and the connotation of the 'middle' intensifies further because the prophet's attention seems fixated on the 'middle' literally and figuratively. Greenberg's translation shows why by preserving the suspense in Ezekiel's narrative: "out of it – out of the fire – appeared something that looked like *hashmal*,"⁵⁰ meaning the divine Majesty (Ezek 1:4).⁵¹

⁴⁷ There is no disagreement among interpreters on the point of its Old Testament antecedent; Lohmeyer (*Offenbarung*, 48) holds that the description of the four living beings is in its entirety taken from Ezekiel 1.

⁴⁸ Possible background for this conception is surveyed in Samuel Terrien's essay, "The Omphalos Myth and Hebrew Religion," *VT* 20 (1979), 315-38. It is noteworthy that Terrien makes special mention of Ezekiel as an example of this notion in the Old Testament (*Ibid.*, 319). See also Michael Fishbane, *Close Readings of Selected Biblical Texts* (New York: Schocken Books, 1979), 112-3; and, *idem.*, "The Sacred Center: The Symbolic Structure of the Bible," in *Texts and Responses: Studies Presented to Nahum N. Glatzer* (eds. Michael A. Fishbane and Paul R. Flohr; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1975), 6-27.

⁴⁹ Stephen G. Brown, "The Intertextuality of Isaiah 66.17 and 2 Thessalonians 2.7: A Solution for the 'Restrainer' Problem," in *Paul and the Scriptures of Israel* (ed. Craig A. Evans and James A. Sanders; JSNTSup 83; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 263.

⁵⁰ Moshe Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1-20* (AB; New York: Doubleday, 1983), 37.

⁵¹ Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 43.

But the gain of a translation that brings the divine Majesty to view in the opening scene need not come at the expense of the connotation of the ‘middle’ that John seeks to preserve when the same scene appears in Revelation. Ezekiel seems to emphasize the notion of the middle – *וּמִתּוֹכָהּ כְּעֵין הַחֹשֶׁמֶל מִתּוֹךְ הָאֵשׁ* – “from the middle of it [the fire], like from the eye or the source, so to speak, appeared something that looked like the *hashmal* from the middle of the fire” (Ezek 1:4, translation mine). In fact, the focus on the middle seems so persistent that the translators of the Septuagint also struggled to convey it, thereby anticipating the laboured phraseology of Revelation – and probably for the same reason.⁵²

When this expression catches the eye in Revelation, it seems more important to grasp the connotation that it is a view of the ‘middle’ than to specify exactly the qualifying referent. The acknowledged oddity of the phrase *ἐν μέσῳ τοῦ θρόνου καὶ κύκλῳ τοῦ θρόνου* (4:6b) and of the closely related *ἐν μέσῳ τοῦ θρόνου καὶ τῶν τεσσάρων ζώων καὶ ἐν μέσῳ τῶν πρεσβυτέρων* (5:6a) is in itself suggestive that the ‘middle’ is a loose construction that seeks to highlight the fact that we are witnessing events taking place in the ‘middle’ as much as to specify that these events happen in the immediate vicinity of the throne or in the midst of the four living creatures.

But this perspective also puts the theme of cosmic conflict in the foreground from the moment of entry into the heavenly throne room in Revelation. On the terms of Ezekiel alone the first glimpse of the divine Majesty in Ezekiel’s inaugural vision conditions the reading of his poem about the “covering cherub” (Ezek 28:11-19). Dismissive readings of this poem fail to notice that it is profusely allusive to Ezekiel’s

⁵² Note the triple *ἐν μέσῳ* in the first two verses of the vision; *ἐν τῷ μέσῳ αὐτοῦ ὡς ὄρασις ἡλέκτρον ἐν μέσῳ τοῦ πυρὸς καὶ φέγγος ἐν αὐτῷ. καὶ ἐν τῷ μέσῳ ὡς ὁμοίωμα τεσσάρων ζώων* (Ezek 1:4-5). Note also Ezek 1:13, *καὶ ἐν μέσῳ τῶν ζώων ὄρασις ὡς ἀνθρώκων πυρὸς καιομένων ὡς ὄψις λαμπάδων συστρεφόμενων ἀνὰ μέσον τῶν ζώων καὶ φέγγος τοῦ πυρὸς καὶ ἐκ τοῦ πυρὸς ἐξεπορεύετο ἀστραπή.*

own narrative and charged with reminders of the inaugural vision of the 'middle' and the fire and brightness flashing forth from the majestic *hashmal*. The "covering cherub" was "on the holy mountain of God," walking back and forth "in the middle of stones of fire" (ἐν μέσῳ λίθων πυρίνων; Ezek 28:14). From his state of exaltation and innocence he was made to leave "the mountain of God" (Ezek 28:16). "And I destroyed you, O covering cherub, From the midst of the fiery stones" (NKJV), expressed as ἐκ μέσου λίθων πυρίνων in the Septuagint (28:16). Ezekiel's inaugural vision and the poem about the "covering cherub" occupy common ground: in both instances attention is riveted on the fiery middle.

When Revelation places its entire prophetic and apocalyptic narrative in the setting of Ezekiel's throne room, the appropriation extends to more than the location conceived in static terms. Revelation's story of cosmic conflict is conditioned not only by the spatial parameters of Ezekiel's inaugural vision but also by the plot described in Ezekiel, that is, the story of the "covering cherub" who was part of the intimate and privileged circle in the 'middle' but is no longer there.⁵³

A fourth element in John's vision of the heavenly throne room lends further support to this trajectory in the narrative, reflecting as well as anticipating the atmosphere of tension that is building steadily in the story (cf. 5:1-4). John sees the four living creatures, each of them with six wings "full of eyes in front and behind" (4:6) or "full of eyes all around and inside" (4:8).⁵⁴ The repeated mention of their eyes connotes intelligence, awareness, and insight,⁵⁵ all of which are revealing characteristics

⁵³ In spatial terms it is sufficient to retain the meaning proposed by Mounce (*Revelation*, 137), "in the immediate vicinity" of the throne, but this designation should also resonate with the action of the evolving plot.

⁵⁴ The imagery of countless eyes alludes to Ezek 1:18 and 10:12.

⁵⁵ Kraft (*Offenbarung*, 99) sees the eyes as a metaphor for the omnipresence of God's spirit with the implication that they symbolize the all-seeing character of God, that is, what *God* sees. In view of

in view of the fact that they are ceaselessly preoccupied with the actions and the reputation of the one who sits on the throne. "Day and night without ceasing" the four living creatures sing, "Holy, holy, holy, the Lord God the Almighty, who was and is and is to come" (4:8).⁵⁶ Their words and example trigger a chain reaction among the twenty-four elders who are also at the centre of the proceedings in the throne room. Casting their crowns before the throne, they prostrate themselves, singing, "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honour and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created" (4:11).

Allowing the war-in-heaven theme to condition the reading of the beginning of Revelation enhances the impact of this scene. Plausible as it may seem that the scene represents "the mysterious formula of the timeless divine totality,"⁵⁷ or John's attempt to "create a bridge between the timelessness of the divine existence and the subservience of creation to time,"⁵⁸ or that Revelation, like other apocalyptic literature, has "continuous adoration" as a prominent feature,⁵⁹ the rising curve of the narrative resists the blandness and detachment implied in these generalizations. As suggested already, the emphatic utterance of praise is not generic in nature; it is cognizant of conflict, and this scene lays the groundwork for appreciating the conflict that rises into the open in the form of the sealed scroll (5:1).

their worship and adoration of God, it is more likely that the emphasis should be on how they see God in relation to all things. In other words, their worship is informed and intelligent. To Mounce (*Revelation*, 138), the eyes signify "alertness and knowledge. Nothing escapes their notice."

⁵⁶ Fekkes (*Isaiah in Revelation*, 145) notes that the *trisagion* of the four living creatures is "unanimously recognized" to come from Is 6:3. It is clear that John conflates Isaiah's and Ezekiel's visions of the throne room (Is 6:1-4; Ezek 1:4-28).

⁵⁷ Lohmeyer, *Offenbarung*, 49.

⁵⁸ Kraft, *Offenbarung*, 101.

⁵⁹ Mounce, *Revelation*, 138; cf. *1 Enoch* 39:12-14; *2 Enoch* 21:1.

Attempting to capture the implied sentiment within the constraints of human language, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders are not merely spending another routine day at the office, mindlessly repeating their prescribed hallelujahs. Instead, they are expressing their admiration for God in a context where God's worthiness is contested.⁶⁰ Worship and adoration take place in intense awareness of the searing memory that one of their own created order aspired to occupy God's throne, and in full recognition of the fact that advocacy for the aspiration of "the Shining One" won a staggering measure of support (12:4).

Remaining Issues: Characters and Plot

The foregoing indicates that there is a compelling unity and continuity in Revelation's narrative. This view is supported by the similarities between the seven trumpets (8:6-9:21) and the seven bowls (16:2-21), and it is further substantiated by the fact that the fall of "the Shining One" is unmistakably featured in the first half of Revelation (4:1-11:19) and not only in the second half (12:1-22:5). The agent executing the horrendous evils unfolding in the trumpet sequence is twice referred to as a star that fell from heaven (8:10; 9:1), and the demonic character of what takes place in this sequence is undeniable. It is important to emphasize that the recapitulation that is in view between the seven trumpets and the seven bowls does not only point toward thematic continuity but also to continuity of agency.

I have suggested that it is inadequate to interpret the dramatic shift from an earthly to a heavenly setting (4:1) as though Revelation merely wishes to contrast earthly turmoil with heavenly peace. Instead, the theme of cosmic conflict accounts

⁶⁰ Roloff (*Revelation*, 72) spots the polemic context to some extent although he relates it to "those earthly rulers who dispute God's unique right to be worshiped" and not to the war-in-heaven theme.

better for what transpires the throne room setting and the crisis-laden presentation of the sealed scroll that sets the tone for the prophetic portion of Revelation (4:1-8:1). Earthly disorder must be seen as a consequence of the conflict that began in heaven, instigated by the subversive aspiration of "the Shining One" (Isa 14:12). This setting takes the reader back to the memory of "the covering cherub" who once occupied the most privileged position in God's immediate presence. In spatial terms the setting of the original subversion is the enigmatic and fiery "middle" of Revelation's view of heaven (4:6; 5:6) as it is in the Old Testament antecedent (Ezek 28:14-16).

As was the case in the attempt to discern the story line from the middle, coming to grips with the setting and the sequence are only preliminary exercises on the way to a better grasp of the characters and the plot. If the opening scene into the heavenly throne room at face value gives the impression that worship of the Creator is a foregone conclusion, an issue settled on the basis of the ontological distinction between Creator and creature alone, the presentation of the sealed scroll (5:1-4) suggests a more complicated picture.

CHAPTER SEVEN

DISCERNING THE STORY LINE FROM THE BEGINNING: CHARACTERS AND PLOT

Introduction

The dominant character at the beginning of Revelation's prophetic-apocalyptic narrative is Jesus in the form of a slaughtered lamb (5:6). In order to understand his role it is important to delineate the relationship between the lamb and the One who sits on the throne. The plot is centred sharply on the sealed scroll (5:1) and on what happens when the scroll is unsealed (6:1-8:1). This chapter will argue that while the One who sits on the throne is defined by the character of the slaughtered lamb, the impact of the stunning disclosure depends on the way one perceives the implicit conflict.

The scroll, here seen as the embodiment of the conflict, is sealed. Finding someone who is able to break the seals is therefore the paramount concern, but will that person be found? On this point the high drama and rising emotional fervour of the throne-room scenes only come to its own when it dawns on the reader that the issue embodied in the scroll overwhelms all known power and capacity, inviting the mind-numbing possibility that a person who is equal to the task may not be found at all.

The Plot and the Sealed Scroll in Revelation 5

It has been suggested that the initial scene of the throne room with its view of the One who sits on the throne reflects exclusive Jewish inspiration, showing "no evidence whatsoever of Christian influence."¹ While this may be true in the sense that the initial scene fits the Jewish view, too, the introduction of Jesus in the form of a slaughtered lamb (5:5-6) should not be interpreted as though it brings in a distinctively Christian

¹ Rowland, "Visions of God," 145.

contrast. Emphasizing contrast sets up a dichotomy in the narrative that is unnecessary and one that undervalues features pointing in the opposite direction. There is no need to make any distinction as to what is specifically Jewish and what is uniquely Christian because the story does not invite the reader to make judgments with respect to sources and much less to set up a conscious contrast between the first throne scene and the scene introducing the Lamb.² Instead, the entire scene in the throne room is replete with continuity in theme and plot. As Larry Hurtado has shown, the entire throne-room scene is influenced by the author's Christian convictions,³ marking the initial scene in Revelation 4 as "a major turning point in the text."⁴ The predicament that becomes explicit with the presentation of the sealed scroll (5:1) is implicit already at the initial entry into the heavenly throne room (4:1), and the resolution to the predicament (5:5-6, 9-10) has already been anticipated in the unrestrained expressions of confidence directed at the One who sits on the throne (4:8-11). The events transpiring in the throne room thus point to a continuous evolving drama arising from the same Old Testament subtext of cosmic conflict.

Specifically, hymnic elements in these chapters (4:8, 11; 5:9, 12-13) highlight the sustained continuity of the plot.⁵ When the twenty-four elders, stirred into action by the four living creatures, extol the worthiness of the One who sits on the throne (4:11), they constitute the lead group that in virtually identical language will affirm the

² Minear (*I Saw a New Earth*, 66) emphasizes the need to read Rev 4:1-8:1 as a unity not only as to the throne scenes in chapters four and five but also including the breaking of the seals. "These throne-pictures should be viewed as dominating the action of the entire vision."

³ L. W. Hurtado, "Revelation 4-5 in the Light of Jewish Apocalyptic Analogies," *JSNT* 25 (1985), 105-24.

⁴ Hurtado, "Revelation 4-5," 110.

⁵ Minear (*I Saw a New Earth*, 67) finds the same centre of gravity in these two chapters. "The details of chapter four, otherwise difficult and centrifugal, come to a focus in the two hymns, one sung by the four living creatures (vs. 8) and one by the twenty-four elders (vs. 11). Similarly, the four hymns of chapter 5 provide the *raison d'être* of that chapter."

worthiness of the Lamb (5:9). This core group is joined by a greatly expanded heavenly choir that takes the worthiness of the One who sits on the throne and the worthiness of the Lamb to be inextricably and indissolubly intertwined (5:13). What may perhaps only be tentatively inferred at the beginning is publicly confirmed at the end through the steady and increasingly explicit theme, the emphatic heavenly affirmation, and the expanding circle of beings that join in the praise. At stake in the throne room scenes, then, is the worthiness of the One who sits on the throne.

Moreover, the question of worthiness that dominates the initial throne room scenes (4:11; 5:2, 4, 9, 12) ultimately comes down to one heavenly being.⁶ The narrative should not be perceived as though the worthiness of the One who sits on the throne is above question. Instead, the worthiness and reputation of the One who sits on the throne stand or fall with the worthiness of the Lamb.⁷ In terms adapted to contemporary issues, this means that one cannot read this sequence of Revelation exclusively from the point of view of later Christological concerns. Establishing Jesus in relation to the divine identity is not only an ontological matter because the worthiness even of the One who sits on the throne is not a predetermined conclusion.⁸ Jesus contributes as much to remove all doubt regarding the worthiness of the One who sits

⁶ Boring ("Narrative Christology," 707), specifying several narrative levels in Revelation, observes that although the drama on the primary visionary level "literally has a cast of thousands, the primary actor at this level is God, the figure on the throne."

⁷ Boring ("Narrative Christology," 707) notes that in Revelation "God is defined by Christ, the one who shares even his throne with Christ (3:21; 12:5; 22:1, 3), so that the figures and especially the voices of God and Christ tend to fade into each other..." Kiddle (*Revelation*, 66-67) claims on behalf of Revelation 4 and 5 that "their essential interest lies in the three songs" (4:11; 5:9; 5:13). His translation of ἄξιός as "thou deservest" seems appropriate.

⁸ The idea that the worthiness of the one who sits on the throne is a contested issue in the heavenly council tends to be eclipsed by the axiomatic notion of divine sovereignty, that is, seeing divine sovereignty as the *a priori* premise to which everything else must conform. This assumption applies across the board of quite diverse interpretations; cf. Mounce, *Revelation*, 134; Boring, *Revelation*, 103; Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 284; Beale, *Revelation*, 172, 369; Schüssler Fiorenza, *Revelation*, 24.

on the throne as the One who sits on the throne makes it a point to drive home the significance of Jesus.

The issue of worthiness comes to a head in the scroll belonging to the One who sits on the throne.

Then I saw in the right hand of the one seated on the throne⁹ a scroll written on the inside and on the back, sealed with seven seals; and I saw a mighty angel proclaiming with a loud voice, "Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?"

Rev 5:1-2

Many commentators agree that the setting within which this question is raised is the divine council,¹⁰ but why is the council assembled, and why in such solemn terms? Is John witness to an enthronement, specifically the enthronement of Jesus after his ascension?¹¹ If the evidence for an enthronement is inadequate, as some interpreters believe, does the solemn scene instead describe the *investiture* of Jesus, a lesser

⁹ Ranko Stefanovic ("The Meaning and Significance of the ἐπὶ τὴν δεξιάν for the Location of the Sealed Scroll (Revelation 5:1) and Understanding the Scene of Revelation 5," *BR* 46 [2001], 42-54) argues that the phrase the ἐπὶ τὴν δεξιάν indicates that the sealed scroll was *on* the right *side* rather than *in* the right *hand* of the one sitting on the throne. Even if this were so, it contributes little to resolve the identity of the scroll, and it does not lessen its importance.

¹⁰ Studies dealing specifically with the concept of the heavenly council in the context of Revelation are H.-P. Müller, "Die Himmlische Ratsversammlung, Motivgeschichtliches zu Apc 5:1-5," *ZNW* 54 (1963), 254-67, and R. Dean Davis, *The Heavenly Court Judgment of Revelation 4-5* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1992). See also Beckwith, *Apocalypse*, 498; Charles, *Revelation*, I, 128; Barclay, *Revelation* I, 153; Caird, *Revelation*, 63; Yarbrow Collins, *Apocalypse*, 34-35; Osborne, *Revelation*, 229.

¹¹ There is no question that enthronement of Jesus is explicitly affirmed in Revelation. "I will give a place with me on my throne, just as I myself conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne," Jesus tells the church in Laodicea (3:21). Upon his birth the crucial male child is "snatched away and taken to God and to his throne" (12:5). Toward the end of Revelation the throne is twice described as ὁ θρόνος τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τοῦ ἀρνίου (22:1, 3). Holtz (*Die Christologie der Apokalypse*, 31) sees enthronement to kingship as the basis for the Christology of Revelation and as the key to the events unfolding in the eschaton. Roloff (*Revelation*, 75) interprets the scene in Revelation 5 as a three-step re-enactment of the traditional Oriental coronation ritual. Beale (*Revelation*, 311) supports the notion of enthronement but more in a figurative sense than as a specific event in time. Ranko Stefanovic ("The Background and Meaning of the Sealed Book of Revelation 5," Ph.D. Dissertation, Andrews University, 1995, 223-24; idem., *Revelation of Jesus Christ* [Berrien Springs: Andrews University Press, 2002], 165-75) makes the notion of enthronement the centerpiece of his interpretation of Revelation, conceiving it in terms of the Davidic monarchy, its ideals, and its historical record. Where the Davidic kings proved unfaithful to the covenant and thus unworthy heirs of the throne, Christ, as the ideal son of David, succeeded. Whether these affirmations of enthronement account for the scene in the throne room in Revelation 5 is nevertheless debatable, partly because the model of Davidic monarchy tends to constrict the cosmic perspective in Revelation.

category of distinction?¹² Or is the divine council assembled for the purpose of judgment?¹³

Since there is reason to believe that the issue before the heavenly council is embodied in the character of the sealed scroll, unravelling the meaning of the scroll is clearly crucial. A persuasive hypothesis with respect to the issue before the divine council depends on a credible interpretation of the scroll, and *vice versa*.¹⁴ In fact, for each theory as to why the divine council is in session, there should be a fairly specific idea regarding the meaning of the scroll. This criterion, however, is only partially fulfilled by the many proposals that have been offered.

As a corollary to enthronement, it has been suggested that the scroll represents the Book of the Covenant.¹⁵ The notion of investiture, on the other hand, is linked to a view of the scroll as the book of destiny,¹⁶ expressed in one version as "the final and fully predetermined stage in God's redemptive purpose for the world."¹⁷ When the heavenly council is perceived as a judgment scene, at least one interpreter sees the scroll as the book of life.¹⁸

¹² Yarbro Collins (*Combat Myth*, 214-15) finds the scene "of an enthroned high god with a second heavenly figure who is being inaugurated into some sort of office" to approximate an investiture rather than an enthronement. Aune (*Revelation 1-5*, 332, 336) favours a similar view.

¹³ Davis, *Heavenly Court Judgment*, 158.

¹⁴ The form of the scroll is a lesser concern than its meaning. Holz (*Die Christologie der Apokalypse*, 32) takes it to be "eine Doppelurkunde," that is, "ancient duplicate certificate" (cf. also Roloff, *Revelation*, 77). When Ezek 2:9-10 is accepted as the antecedent to the scroll in Revelation, it is seen as an *opistograph*, a scroll written on both sides; cf. Edgar J. Goodspeed, "The Book with Seven Seals," *JBL* 22 (1903), 70-74; Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 341.

¹⁵ Stefanovic (*Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 167, 176) argues that the scroll represents the Book of the Covenant, but he also thinks that it "is closely related to the book of Revelation itself."

¹⁶ Yarbro Collins, *Combat Myth*, 216.

¹⁷ Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 374.

¹⁸ Davis, *Heavenly Court Judgment*, 181-83.

The divergent character of these interpretations and the fluid boundaries between the respective categories are further evident in the fact that the notion of enthronement, like that of investiture, is also deemed compatible with the scroll as a book of destiny.¹⁹ Where there is no articulated view of the council the scroll has been variously seen as the Torah,²⁰ the book of destiny,²¹ the book of Revelation,²² or as "the Lamb's last will and testament."²³

Where the focus is on the relationship between the seals of the scroll and its contents, interpretations cover a wide range of yet other widely divergent possibilities. To van Unnik, "it is not explained what the contents of this secret book were."²⁴ While he considers this "an excruciating riddle," he feels assuaged by the conviction that the emphasis is on the worthiness of the Lamb and not on the contents of the scroll.²⁵ Bauckham, on the other hand, takes the position that "it would be intolerable if John left it unclear what the content of the scroll is."²⁶ On this point many interpreters would

¹⁹ Holtz, *Die Christologie der Apokalypse*, 35; Roloff, *Revelation*, 76; Beale, *Revelation*, 340.

²⁰ Ford, *Revelation*, 87-88.

²¹ To Swete (*Apocalypse*, 75), the scroll is "the Book of Destiny;" to Charles (*Revelation*, I, 138), it "contains the divine decrees and the destinies of the world;" to Caird (*Revelation*, 72), "the world's destiny;" to Mounce (*Revelation*, 142), the scroll contains "the full account of what God in his sovereign will has determined as the destiny of the world;" and to Metzger (*Breaking the Code*, 52), it is "the book of the eternal decrees of God."

²² Roland Bergmeier, "Die Buchrolle und das Lamm (Apk 5 und 10)," *ZNW* 76 (1985), 230.

²³ Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 248.

²⁴ W. C. van Unnik, "'Worthy is the Lamb:' The Background of Apoc 5," in *Mélanges bibliques en hommage au R. P. Bédarida Rigaux* (eds. Albert Descamps and André de Halleux; Gembloux: Duculot, 1970), 459. Aune (*Revelation 1-5*, 343) also seems inclined to accept that the content of the scroll is left unexplained; cf. also Boxall, *Vision and Insight*, 57.

²⁵ van Unnik, "Worthy is the Lamb," 459. This view is shared by Pierre Prigent (*Commentary on the Apocalypse of St. John* [trans. Wendy Pradels; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001], 245).

²⁶ Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 249.

concur, but this agreement has not led to unanimity in terms of what the content is or on how it is disclosed.²⁷

All this suggests that strict lines of demarcation between various interpretations tend to go beyond what the evidence warrants, that diverse terminology may be used for essentially the same idea or action, and that some interpretations complement others rather than exclude them. Certain specific caveats are nevertheless possible with respect to some of the alternatives described above. The relationship between the proposed enthronement of Jesus and the Book of Covenant²⁸ is weakened by an Israelitic monarchical perspective that falls short of the cosmic scope of Revelation and by a Deuteronomistic ideology that constrains the cosmic dualism of good and evil in the book.²⁹ A conception of the scroll as the book of destiny has served as a safe default position in many interpretations, but it tends to diffuse and generalize the dilemma that the heavenly council is assembled to resolve. If severed from the issue that lies at the root of the cosmic conflict in Revelation, the scroll is deprived of the

²⁷ To Kraft (*Offenbarung*, 105), the breaking of the seals signifies 'breaking the spell' more than unveiling with the end result that there is no more mention of the scroll when the last seal is broken. Pointing to the events that accompany the breaking of each seal, Caird (*Revelation*, 71) insists that the whole process would be meaningless unless the breaking of the seals is somehow related to the content of the scroll. Ford (*Revelation*, 92) holds a similar opinion. Conversely, Bauckham (*Climax of Prophecy*, 248) thinks that the scroll "is a document whose contents cannot be known until the seals are broken and the scroll unrolled." Beale (*Revelation*, 347) rejects Bauckham's objection to a progressive revelation of the book's content on the ground that it is an overly rigid application of Revelation's imagery. Mazzaferri (*Genre*, 265-79) argues that the βιβλίον in Rev 5:1 is identical with the βιβλαρίδιον in Rev 10:2, and Bauckham (*Climax of Prophecy*, 243) claims that this point has been conclusively established. However, this particular point is no more conclusive than that Beale (*Revelation*, 530-32), Aune (*Revelation 6-16*, 571-72), and Garrow (*Revelation*, 31-33) offer cogent arguments to the contrary. Garrow (*Revelation*, 33, 124-25) believes that the little scroll foreshadows the events described in the main scroll, the former finding fulfilment in Rev 12:1-14:5. Aune (*Revelation 6-16*, 507), assuming with others that the content of the scroll cannot be known until all the seals are broken, believes that "the contents of the scroll can only be the remainder of Revelation," that is, Rev 8:2-22:5.

²⁸ Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 174.

²⁹ Davidic kingship seems inadequate as a model for the enthronement of Jesus in view of the cosmic dimensions of the apocalyptic perspective in Revelation, and the implied monistic outlook of Deuteronomy fits poorly with John's explicit cosmic dualism. If this model is to remain viable, it will be necessary to transpose the idea of the Davidic monarchy onto a cosmic framework and to resolve the limitations of the apparent monistic world view of Deuteronomy in the context of Revelation. A blending of cosmic and Davidic motifs is suggested in Psalm 89.

historical and conceptual torso to which it belongs. The juxtaposition of judgment with the book of life has not been persuasive for the scene transpiring in the heavenly throne room in these chapters.

The present interpretation does not find it inadmissible to construe the scene in the throne room as a specific event in time – an enthronement, an investiture, or even a judgment scene – but such a construction rises to the proportion of Revelation's narrative only when the issue facing the council is kept in the foreground. Already in the initial throne room scene the reader must be cognizant of the conflict or the connotation of conflict that pervades the book.

The previous chapter took the first steps toward bringing the conflict theme in the first part of Revelation out in the open. This was done partly by demonstrating that the heavenly setting of the definitive disclosure takes the Seer to the location of the original war in heaven (4:1); by featuring the same Old Testament allusions to the fall of "the Shining One" in the first part of Revelation as in the rest of the book (8:10; 9:1), documenting that the networking of these allusions signify thematic unity and continuity; and by suggesting that the repetitive fractionation that is the hallmark of the destructive agent in the trumpet cycle is best understood in the light of the primordial fall of the dragon and his angels later in the book (12:3-4). Particularly significant is the fact that the progression, intensification, and climactic forward movement of the bowl cycle (16:1-21) – in the section where the combat theme is undeniable (chapters 12-20) – continues and brings to completion a theme that was laid out and developed earlier – in the section where the combat theme, at least in the eyes of many modern readers, is only implicit (chapters 4-11). The ending in the second half of the book must not be shorn of, or severed from, the beginning in the first half.

Keeping these elements in mind, the present chapter takes further steps to show how the sealed scroll and the breaking of the seals belong to the theme of cosmic conflict. In this sense Yarbrow Collins' assessment, quoted previously, succinctly takes stock of the anchoring point of Revelation's story line. "In the context of the Apocalypse as a whole it is clear that the problem facing the heavenly council is the rebellion of Satan which is paralleled by rebellion on earth. Chapter five presupposes the old story of Satan's rebellion against God which leads to the fall of creation."³⁰

This proposal provides the most adequate scaffolding for the story line in Revelation, according a central role to the war-in-heaven theme.³¹ A number of consequences emerge from this understanding with respect to the initial scene in the throne room. The cosmic perspective means that the heavenly beings are assembled for their own sake, not only in order to model heavenly peace for the benefit of the earthly believer. The issue before the heavenly council, framed in terms of the worthiness of the One who sits on the throne, has a bearing on heavenly beings as much as on earthly realities. When Revelation asserts that "war broke out in heaven" (12:7), the perspective includes how the conflict arose, the contestants in the conflict, and an understanding of the means with which the uprising will be overcome. The repeated identification of Satan as "the deceiver" (ὁ πλανῶν) signifies that Satan wins support for his cause and programme by something other than what he truly represents.³² If this is the case, simple demolition of the deceiver will not suffice unless or until his true character has become manifest.

³⁰ Yarbrow Collins, *Apocalypse*, 39. Davis (*Heavenly Court Judgment*, 168) and Stefanovic (*Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 204) refer positively to Yarbrow Collins' view, but they do not pursue its implications or invest it with explanatory power.

³¹ As argued earlier, Yarbrow Collins' view of the cosmic conflict in Revelation is weakened by the decision to paint it on the canvas of extra-biblical mythology at the expense of the biblical narrative.

³² Satan is identified as "the deceiver" in Rev 12:9 and 20:10, and verbal character of his activity, directly or by proxy, aims to deceive; cf. Rev 20:3,8; 13:14; 18:23; 19:20.

Such a perception of the cosmic conflict depends on presentation of evidence for its resolution. To the extent that the deceiver wins support by purporting to be what he is not, he must be unmasked by evidence to the contrary, that is, by the evidence of his own actual deeds. To the extent that the deceiver gains influence by slandering his opponent, again hewing close to the language of Revelation and to the indicators of the agent's programme,³³ *his cause will unravel if the actual deeds of his opponent turn out to be different from what the slanderer has made them out to be.* The crucial point relates to the fact that *a conflict of this nature cannot be resolved by force.* Inevitably, this requirement exposes at least one troubling risk that is intrinsic to the non-use of force: If the deceiver is partly to be unmasked by the evidence of his own actions, it means that he will be granted the opportunity to bring his design to fruition. Satan must be allowed to commit evil for his evil character to be manifest. The political risk to the divine government of this projected policy, not to mention the theological risk, hardly needs to be elaborated.

This argument may be put in perspective by putting it on fast-forward to what Bauckham has identified as the import of the throne room scene. He contends that "when the slaughtered Lamb is seen 'in the midst of' the divine throne in heaven (5:6; cf. 7:17), the meaning is that Christ's sacrificial death *belongs to the way God rules the world.*"³⁴ In the present context this insight should not be read only as a characterization of the divine government in contrast to the Roman imperial power. The cosmic scope must be appreciated for the force of the imagery of the slaughtered

³³ The character of the adversary as *slanderer* is embedded in the name διάβολος (Rev 12:9; 20:2), and the critical point of reference for his slanderous activity is given when his persona is identified with "the ancient serpent" (ὁ ὄφις ὁ ἀρχαῖος). Revelation is not alone in pointing to this element in the cosmic conflict. In the Gospel of John Jesus calls the devil "a liar and the father of lies" (John 8:44), even alluding to the staggering misrepresentation in the Genesis account of the fall as "*the lie*" (τὸ ψεῦδος).

³⁴ Bauckham, *Revelation*, 64.

Lamb to emerge fully, and the biblical narrative should be prioritized as its most crucial point of reference.

The proclamation of a mighty angel, “Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?” (5:2), puts the vexing question before the council in bold relief. On the one hand, as Prigent points out, “it is God himself who presents the book, and not merely an angel. It is therefore more than ever a message whose origin is the person of God himself.”³⁵ On the other hand, the character of the One who sits on the throne is manifested in the slaughtered Lamb. Bauckham observes that “the importance of John’s extraordinarily high Christology for the message of Revelation is that it makes absolutely clear that what Christ does, God does.”³⁶ The God who presents the scroll and the Lamb who is up to the task of breaking its seals occupy the same ground ontologically *and* ideologically.³⁷ This awareness should be the context of Aune’s comment that ἄξιος “does not simply mean ‘able’ (i.e., the opposite of οὐδεὶς ἐδύνατο, ‘no one was able,’ in v. 3), but it means rather ‘qualified’ in the sense of having the proper qualifications to perform this special task.”³⁸

The verdict of worthiness seems indissolubly linked to the values and the means of the character that is said to be worthy. His qualities are highlighted by the announcement that “the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered” so as to meet the requirements for opening the scroll (5:5). By deploying the allusion “the Root of David,” Revelation brings to view the exceptional character of the

³⁵ Prigent, *Apocalypse of St. John*, 242.

³⁶ Bauckham, *Revelation*, 63.

³⁷ This is amply confirmed when Revelation ultimately identifies the throne as ὁ θρόνος τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τοῦ ἀρνίου (22:1.3).

³⁸ Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 347.

promised Restorer in Isaiah (Isa 11:1-5), where the emphasis is on *how* “the Root of David” will go about his task. The royal pedigree is in place, but it is his method that sets him apart, so much so that when his work is done, “the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea” (Isa 11:9). Indeed, the text sets up a criterion for making right what has gone wrong, using the Garden of Eden as its point of reference (Isa 11:6-8). On this point Otto Kaiser comments perceptively that “if the suckling and little child play with the most poisonous snakes, the old enmity between the seed of the woman and the seed of the snake has been removed (Gen 3.15). Thus the text probably says less than it knows.”³⁹

It is possible to specify the worthiness of the Lamb still further. John writes that the Lamb appeared ὡς ἐσφαγμένον (5:6). In their song of adoration the four living beings and the twenty-four elders, expressing it in the second person, take this fact as the basis for their ascription of worthiness to him (5:9). “For you were slaughtered” (ὅτι ἐσφάγης), they explain (5:9), and the implication of this expression is “to kill a person with violence.”⁴⁰ Ritual sacrifice is not the primary sense of σφάζειν. Ford is probably correct that “the slaughter of the lamb and the function of his blood must be seen against the background of battle and/or martyrdom.”⁴¹ Whether the Lamb is slain in battle or is martyred does not constitute a crucial distinction because either possibility, read as a metaphor for “the way God rules the world,”⁴² demonstrates that violent means are used by the opposing side but are not used by God. On this point Anthony Tyrrell Hanson’s exceptional study of this subject goes to the heart of the

³⁹ Otto Kaiser, *Isaiah 1-12* (trans. R. A. Wilson, 2d ed.; OTL; London: SCM Press, 1983), 260.

⁴⁰ Ford, *Revelation*, 90.

⁴¹ Ford, *Revelation*, 90.

⁴² Bauckham, *Revelation*, 64.

matter. "Christ and the saints conquer by dying; Satan and the powers of evil by physical force."⁴³

Implied in the ascription of worthiness to Jesus is the idea that he has been severely tested and thereby proved his worthiness.⁴⁴ In fact, the criteria for worthiness are so exceptional that in the entire universe there is only person who fits the billing. It is of utmost importance to bring this out in the narrative. Paul J. Achtemeier observes that the summons for one who is worthy "is greeted with silence – unaccustomed silence,"⁴⁵ and Bauckham takes note "not only that the Lamb is worthy, but also that *no one else is worthy*."⁴⁶

The Plot and the Breaking of the Seals (6:1-8:1)

Since the worthiness of the Lamb is signified by the fact that he alone has the requisite qualities to open the sealed scroll, it might be expected that these qualities will stand out more distinctly as the seals are broken. Numerous elements in this sequence support this expectation.

First, the issue facing the council has some relationship to what happens when the seals are broken.⁴⁷ When the four horses and horsemen of the Apocalypse (6:1-8)

⁴³ Anthony Tyrrell Hanson, *The Wrath of the Lamb* (London: SPCK, 1957), 165. In the message to the church at Pergamum the hallmark of the satanic rule and instinct is said to be violence, persecution, and murder. "I know where you are living," says the speaker, ὅπου ὁ θρόνος τοῦ Σατανᾶ, proved by the murder of the faithful witness Antipas, ὅπου ὁ Σατανᾶς κατοικεῖ (2:13).

⁴⁴ van Unnik, "Worthy is the Lamb," 448-61.

⁴⁵ Paul J. Achtemeier, "Revelation 5:1-14," *Int* 40 (1986), 284.

⁴⁶ Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 136.

⁴⁷ Caird (*Revelation*, 71), as noted, contends that "as each of the seven seals is broken, events happen; and the whole process of the breaking of the seals, with the accompanying events, is meaningless unless it is somehow related to the contents of the book." Bauckham (*Climax of Prophecy*, 248), however, argues to the contrary that the scroll "is a document whose contents cannot be known until the seals are broken and the scroll unrolled." If these views are seen as opposite approaches to the relationship between the breaking of the seals and the content of the scroll, the evidence clearly favours Caird's position.

enter the arena, a series of increasingly severe disasters unfold. Caird perceptively takes stock of the evocative force and general direction of these 'disclosures' when he finds them to be anticlimactic. "Then on to the stage of history come only four horsemen representing disasters as old as the human race. Is this all that we are to receive from the regnant Christ?" he asks.⁴⁸ If the expectation preceding the breaking of each seal is novelty, the events reported speak only of distressingly familiar scenes of conquest, war, famine, and death.⁴⁹ To the question, 'What is new at the breaking of the first four seals?' the answer could legitimately be, 'Nothing.' 'Old' knowledge, on the other hand, is easily verified, and this knowledge points to the most perplexing realities of human existence.

⁴⁸ Caird, *Revelation*, 82.

⁴⁹ Factors that bear on the interpretation of the seals are the Old Testament antecedent(s), the significance of the four horses taken together, the meaning of the white horse and its rider, and the context of cosmic dualism. Most interpreters agree that the motif of the four horses and horsemen are taken from Zechariah (Zech 1:7-11 and 6:1-8); cf. Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 393. In Zechariah the motif has the connotation of agents appraising the state of the earth. Treating the four horses and their riders as a group that has the same valence is the most persuasive option, although interpreters disagree as to whether the events reported signify destructive and demonic activity or whether they are instigated by God. The present interpretation unequivocally favours the option that sees the four horses as a group and their activity as destructive; cf. arguments by Charles (*Revelation I*, 160), Roloff (*Revelation*, 86), Aune (*Revelation 6-16*, 393-94), Beale (*Revelation*, 370, 377). Stefanovic (*Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 235) allegorizes the imagery, making the four horses represent "the victorious spreading of the gospel and the consequences of rejecting it." There is no need to insist that the rider on the white horse represents Christ since white-coloured horses are also found in the underlying Old Testament motif in Zechariah (Zech 1:8; 6:2). André Feuillet ("Le premier cavalier de l'Apocalypse," *ZNW* 57 [1966], 239) contends that the colour white is nowhere in Revelation associated with a demonic being, but this assertion would be disproved if the first horse is evidence to the contrary. In line with the present thesis, Mathias Rissi ("The Rider on the White Horse," *Int* 18 [1964], 414-16) argues that "the rider on the white horse appears as a part of a group that acts as demonic agents of destruction," configuring the identity of this rider according to the figure of Gog (Ezek 38 and 39), the apocalyptic last enemy whose characteristic weapon is the bow (Ezek 39:3, 9). Intriguingly, Allen Kerkeslager ("Apollo, Greco-Roman Prophecy and the Rider on the White Horse in Rev 6:2," *JBL* 112 [1993], 116-21) takes the white horse to signify deceptive and counterfeit activity on the part of its rider. Michael Bachmann ("Der erste apokalyptische Reiter und die Anlage des letzten Buches der Bibel," *Bib* 67 [1986], 240-75) defends a Christological view of the first rider, arguing that he stands in contrast to the following riders. Stefanovic (*Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 167, 225) suggests that the sealed scroll represents the Book of the Covenant in an enthronement setting on the order of Deut 17:18-20. Predicated on this supposition the breaking of the seals brings judgments patterned on the covenant curses in Deuteronomy (Deut 28:15-68); "the sword, famine, and pestilence of the horses are the preliminary judgments on God's people who reject or disobey the gospel." While the case for allusions to Deuteronomy is persuasive, this interpretation suffers from failing to articulate how the Deuteronomic imagery is transformed by the context of cosmic conflict in Revelation.

Second, the scroll in Ezekiel's initial *Merkabah* vision must be seen as the Old Testament antecedent to the scroll in Revelation.⁵⁰ In Revelation the scroll is written "on the inside and on the back" (5:1). As in Revelation Ezekiel's experience is related to the throne room (Ezek 1:26), there is a scroll, and the scroll is described in similar terms.

I looked, and a hand was stretched out to me, and a written scroll was in it. He spread it before me; it had writing on the front and on the back, and written on it were words of lamentation and mourning and woe.⁵¹

Ezek 2:9-10

The content of Ezekiel's scroll is known; "its front and back were covered with writing,"⁵² and the message is "lamentation and mourning and woe" (Ezek 2:10). Revelation's scroll, on the other hand, is "sealed with seven seals" (5:1). But this striking contrast does not nullify the similarity and is in a sense more imagined than real. To the extent that the breaking of the seals heralds the content of the scroll, as noted above, the qualitative parameters of the two scrolls are identical. Revelation's scroll, too, densely written "on the inside and on the back" (5:1), contains "words of lamentation and mourning and woe" (Ezek 2:10) – no less than the scroll in Ezekiel. As expressed by Caird, the events unfolding with the breaking of the first four seals, at least, point to "disasters as old as the human race,"⁵³ and the allusion to Ezekiel corroborates this impression. The fact that the scroll is sealed does not necessarily signify that the content is not known. Instead, the content may be known but not

⁵⁰ Cf. Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 339; Beale, *Revelation*, 337.

⁵¹ The strongest parallel relates to the description of the writing. Revelation has ἔσωθεν καὶ ὀπίσθεν (5:1), the LXX has τὰ ὀπίσθεν καὶ τὰ ἔμπροσθεν while BHS has וְהָיָא כְּחוּבָה פְּנִים וְאַחֲרֵי, "it was written (on it) on the front and on the back" (Ezek 2:10).

⁵² Greenberg's translation of Ezek 2:10b (cf. *Ezekiel 1-20*, 60).

⁵³ Caird, *Revelation*, 82

understood, and in that case the essential problem relates to discernment and not only to information.

A third element in the sequence of the seals strengthens the hypothesis that the critical issue has to do with understanding of a known reality more than with disclosure of new facts. A number of interpreters single out the fifth seal as significant (6:9-11),⁵⁴ possibly as the key to the interpretation of the scroll.⁵⁵

When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slaughtered for the word of God and for the testimony they had given;¹⁰ they cried out with a loud voice, "Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long will it be before you judge and avenge our blood on the inhabitants of the earth?"

Rev 6:9-10

Seeing the fifth seal thematically related to the previous four,⁵⁶ the slain martyrs articulate the perplexing sentiment that is implicit in the first four seals. War, famine, and death are followed by injustice in the form of persecution and violent slaughter of the faithful believer. This picture will not be in want of historical fulfilment, but the imagery must also be informed by the Old Testament background. The cry, "how long," echoes the recurring and quintessential theodicy question of the biblical narrative,⁵⁷ and it arises from the most timeless reality of the believer's experience.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Cf. Caird, *Revelation*, 82; Ford, *Revelation*, 110; J. Lambrecht, "The Opening of the Seals (Rev 6,1-8,6)," *Bib* 79 (1998), 198-220. "The pivotal function of the fifth seal cannot be denied," Lambrecht writes with emphasis (*Ibid.*, 209). To Biguzzi ("'Persecution' in the Apocalypse," 212), the cry of the slain martyrs "is the genetic nucleus of the whole narrative cycle of the scroll" (4:1-8:1). Without denying genetic import to these verses (6:9-11), I take the position that the cry of the martyrs is not specific to, or limited to, the situation of believers in John's day.

⁵⁵ John Paul Heil, "The Fifth Seal (Rev 6,9-11) as a Key to the Book of Revelation," *Bib* 74 (1993), 220-43.

⁵⁶ The thematic continuity between the four horsemen and the cry of the slain martyrs is enhanced by the fact that allusions to Zechariah relate to the first *five* seals, not only to the first *four* (Zech 1:8-12; cf. Beale, *Revelation*, 393).

⁵⁷ A host of scriptural references are pertinent to this theme; Ps 6:3; 74:9-10; 79:5; 80:4; 90:13; 94:3-7; Isa 6:11; Jer 4:21; 23:26; 47:5-6; Hab 1:2-4; Zech 1:12; Dan 8:13; 12:6. Cf. also Caird, *Revelation*, 84; Mounce, *Revelation*, 159; Giblin, *Revelation*, 86.

Sampling only Habakkuk's theodicy question as it appears and is perceived in its native Old Testament context (Hab 1:2-4), what is heard is "the passionate prayer of a desperate man," a prayer that "sounds a single note and is driven by one mood – moral outrage and perplexity."⁵⁹ In the martyrs' question, too, there is concern about God's apparent failure to maintain justice, a sense of distress in the face of justice delayed, perhaps even a hint of delinquency on the part of God in upholding the moral order.

If the foregoing captures the gist of the martyrs' sentiment, the short-term outlook in the response to their cry is hardly reassuring. "They were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer, until the number would be complete both of their fellow servants and of their brothers and sisters, who were soon to be killed as they themselves had been killed" (6:11). For the slain martyr this is hardly an answer. It is rather a sharpened focus on the reality that was troubling to begin with: the free reins allowed to the murderers of the faithful. In this sense the answer merely underscores the concern that is not understood and the impression that understanding is the crucial point. Interpreters who are reassured that a better answer to the martyrs' prayer is forthcoming in the trumpet sequence (8:3-5), seeing God meting out punitive judgment on the perpetrators of injustice, do not escape the reality that freedom to commit evil is granted in the first place.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ The *locus classicus* in terms of theodicy questions in the Old Testament is Hab 1:2-4, but clearly pertinent in the present context are also Ps 79:1-10, Zech 1:8-13, Dan 8:13, and Dan 12:6. Of particular interest is the answer to the "how long" question in Dan 12:6 since the figure who brings the answer seems to 'reappear' in Revelation 10:5-6. The answer of this angelic figure in Daniel is as stark as the answer to the martyrs in Revelation, "When the power of the holy people has been finally broken, all these things will be completed" (Dan 12:7 NIV).

⁵⁹ Francis I. Andersen, *Habakkuk. New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 25; New York: Doubleday, 2001), 123, 125.

⁶⁰ It has been argued that the connection between the fifth seal and the immediate prelude to the trumpet cycle (8:3-5) shows that the trumpets bring the judgment ardently sought by the slain martyrs, that is, the trumpets are the answer to their prayer for justice; cf. Yarbrow Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 114; Paulien, *Revelation's Trumpets*, 318-22; Heil, "The Fifth Seal," 232; Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 112; Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 277. This is not convincing if the trumpets recapitulate the

In qualitative terms each of the first five seals reveals familiar realities and speaks to known concerns. This is not to suggest that there is no new disclosure at all as the seals are broken. As noted already, there is progression and intensification within each cycle beginning with the seven seals, and there is further progression and intensification as the theme of the first cycle is recapitulated in the trumpet and the bowl cycles.⁶¹ This evolution suggests a corresponding forward movement in history as each seal is broken, but this progression does not in itself resolve the issue before the heavenly council. On the contrary, each seal represents a mystery that must be explained, and in this sense the cry of the slain martyrs merely articulates and accentuates the issue before the council. What is unsealed in terms of content and the historical realities that come to light must also be 'unsealed' in terms of explaining what it means.

Fourth, there are significant and relevant Old Testament antecedents for the notion that sealing can refer to a message that is not understood and that unsealing may signify the moment of understanding and insight. Two texts hold special relevance in this respect.⁶² In Isaiah, the prophet explains that

the Lord has poured out upon you a spirit of deep sleep; he has closed your eyes, you prophets, and covered your heads, you seers. The vision of all this has become for you *like the words of a sealed document*. If it is given to those who can read, with the command, "Read this," they say, "We cannot, for it is sealed." And if it is given to those who cannot read, saying, "Read this," they say, "We cannot read." ...On that day the deaf shall hear the words of a scroll, and out of

seals, in which case the seals also bring judgment, but the view that judgment is already in progress does not seem to be shared by the slain martyrs under the fifth seal since they decry the absence of justice.

⁶¹ Charles (*Revelation* I, 160) notes that "the more closely the vision is studied, the more manifest becomes the dramatic fullness of the order of the Seals, and the growing intensity of the evils they symbolize."

⁶² Cf. Otto Roller, "Das Buch mit sieben Siegeln," *ZNW* 36 (1937), 101; Aune, *Revelation* 1-5, 346. Stefanovic (*Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 170) uses Isa 29:10-11 to determine the identity of the scroll in Revelation and to support his thesis that the issue relates to apostasy and human sin. In the present interpretation the notion of sealing in this passage is taken to apply to the most eye-catching and general aspect of the 'sealed' book in Isaiah: the message is not understood.

their gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind shall see.
Isa 29:10-11, 18, emphasis added

In Daniel, the connection between sealing and understanding is explicit, and it refers to a state that will remain until discernment is made possible by the necessary 'unsealing.'

He said, "Go your way, Daniel, for the words are to remain secret and sealed until the time of the end. Many shall be purified, cleansed, and refined, but the wicked shall continue to act wickedly. None of the wicked shall understand, but those who are wise shall understand."

Dan 12:9-10

No other Old Testament texts apply convincingly to help explain this aspect of the central concern in the heavenly throne room: the scroll is sealed, and exceptional qualities are required for the seals to be broken.⁶³ These texts, however, are examples of books that are sealed, and they show that a sealed scroll does not have to mean a document that is inaccessible in terms of what it *says*. It can instead refer to a reality that is obscure because no one is able to explain what it *means*. Likewise, the breaking of a seal in the sense noted above is not to be construed primarily or exclusively in terms of initiating or unleashing a series of events.⁶⁴ The primary concern is not how to make the event happen but the understanding of the event. What is sealed in the present context relates in the broadest sense to the relationship between a familiar reality and the character of the divine government.

⁶³ Fekkes' argument (*Isaiah in Revelation*, 149) against a relationship between the sealed book in Isa 29:10-11 and the sealed scroll in Revelation is predicated on criteria for allusions that are too mechanical.

⁶⁴ Kraft (*Offenbarung*, 105) makes the breaking of the seals refer to the 'unbinding' of events. Caird (*Revelation*, 82, 71), who sees the breaking of the seals deflating the expectation that something new is about to happen, holds that "the Lamb does not merely disclose its contents, but puts them into operation."

Fifth, at the breaking of each of the first four seals (6:1-8), as the rider is sent forth to execute his task, the term ἐδόθη αὐτῷ appears. The expression is used a total of five times in these verses alone, heralding riders that bring conquest, bloodshed, famine, and death. While this terminology at face value might seem to conform to the idea of the 'divine passive,'⁶⁵ understood as a circumlocution of divine activity, the context of cosmic conflict in Revelation necessitates a more nuanced and precise view of this expression.⁶⁶ When the phrase is understood as a circumlocution for divine agency, the implication is judgment sent by God, as many interpreters have come to see it.⁶⁷ If, on the other hand, ἐδόθη αὐτῷ has the connotation of allowing or permitting,⁶⁸ the context of cosmic conflict makes an evil power the agent of the destructive event. Again, the dualist worldview and perspective of Revelation must not be eclipsed by a monist understanding of agency. In the large majority of cases in Revelation this expression predominantly denotes opportunity given to evil powers to inflict harm and suffering on the world, and the fourth rider, Death and Hades – if not his predecessors, present the unequivocal credentials of an evil power.⁶⁹ When the context of cosmic conflict is kept in mind, the evil that is unfolding is attributable to the activity of an evil power.

⁶⁵ Aune (*Revelation 6-16*, 394-95) accepts the traditional idea of the *passivum divinum* but notes that the expression by itself cannot resolve whether the "divine enablement" refers to a positive or negative activity.

⁶⁶ The term ἐδόθη is used a total of twenty-one times in Revelation (6:2; 6:4 (twice); 6:8; 6:11; 7:2; 8:3; 9:1; 9:3; 9:5; 11:1; 11:2; 13:5 (twice); 13:7 (twice); 13:14; 13:15; 16:8; 19:8; 20:4). Five of these occurrences are 'positive' (6:11; 8:3; 11:1; 19:8; 20:4), describing privileges given to the redeemed. One is ambivalent (7:2). The remaining instances refer to permission to inflict harm. The passive plural ἐδόθησαν is used twice, indicating divine commission (8:2) and divine assistance (12:14).

⁶⁷ This view, as noted previously, is held by such interpreters as Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 114; Paulien, *Revelation's Trumpets*, 318-22; Heil, "The Fifth Seal," 232; Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 434; Beale, *Revelation*, 112; Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 277.

⁶⁸ Cf. Matthew Black, "Some Greek Words with 'Hebrew' Meanings in the Epistles and the Apocalypse," in *Biblical Studies. Essays in Honour of William Barclay* (eds. Johnston R. McKay and James F. Miller; London: Collins, 1976), 145-46; Thompson, *The Apocalypse and Semitic Syntax*, 14.

⁶⁹ Caird, *Revelation*, 81. The notion of an evil power is even more unequivocal in connection with the fallen star of the fifth trumpet, καὶ ἐδόθη αὐτῷ ἡ κλεῖς τοῦ φρέατος τῆς ἀβύσσου (9:1).

Remembering that Satan gains influence by pretending to be something other than what he is,⁷⁰ ἑδόθη αὐτῷ signifies authorization and even insistence for the opposing side to reveal what he truly represents. The one who breaks the seals is not causing the suffering brought by the horsemen, and these calamities reflect on the government of God only in the sense that God allows the opposing side to do it and thereby to show its real nature.⁷¹

Sixth, preceding the emergence of each of the four horsemen, a commanding “Come!” is heard in heaven (6:1, 3, 5, 7). This imperative is particularly solemn and majestic in advance of the first rider, καὶ ἤκουσα ἑνὸς ἐκ τῶν τεσσάρων ζώων λέγοντος ὡς φωνὴ βροντῆς, Ἐρχου (6:1). Proclaimed “as with a voice of thunder,” the command to the four horsemen clearly connotes more than passive acquiescence for a certain task to be carried out. Mere permission, in other words, is an inadequate category for the actions in view and for language that repeatedly employs the imperative. In the context of cosmic conflict, this striking form of speech is as close as one gets to a ‘dialogue’ between the two sides in the conflict. Seeing the events transpiring in the wake of the horses and their riders as the work of an evil power, the thunderous Ἐρχου preceding each of the four horsemen resounds across the great divide in the conflict, calling on the opposing side to make its programme manifest. In the setting of the heavenly council, and in view of the subversive charges made against

⁷⁰ Satan’s essential characteristic in the cosmic conflict relates from beginning to end to his role as the *deceiver* (ὁ πλανῶν). Variants of this term represent Satan’s primary activity ‘in person’ (12:9; 20:3, 8, 10) and the activity of surrogate powers (13:14; 18:23; 19:20). In Revelation’s description of the range of the surrogate powers, it is evident that their deceptive force lies in falsely appropriating the identity and characteristics of the opponent’s trademarks. For instance, the beast that arises from the sea also appears “as if it has been slain” (ὡς ἐσφαγμένον, 13:3; cf. 5:6), and the beast that comes from the earth looks like “a lamb” (ἀρνίον) but speaks “like a dragon” (13:11).

⁷¹ Interpreters who are reluctant to accept divine agency for the calamities reported in Revelation nevertheless walk a fine line when attempting to make a distinction. Schüssler Fiorenza, (*Revelation*, 63) states that even though “the seven plague seals are set in motion by the Lamb as the agent who opens the seals, John does not assert that these calamities are decreed by God. God authorizes the calamities but does not will them.”

the government of God, the sealed scroll contains the evidence that lies before the council, and the slaughtered Lamb is the only one who can explain it.

At the heart of the scroll that is sealed, then, lies the nature of the divine government and the character of the One who sits on the throne. What needs to be explained and defended, as much before the heavenly council (5:2) as to the slain martyrs under the fifth seal (6:9-10), relates to the means by which the One who sits on the throne brings the cosmic conflict to a victorious conclusion. If the language on the one hand seems to precipitate the inevitable showdown, urging and even insisting that the opposing side come forward, it also reflects unshaken confidence in the divine approach.⁷² When the commanding, "Ἐρχου is understood in this way, it indicates that the speaker welcomes what will come to light.

Lastly, the enigma of the seventh seal also favours the proposition that discernment lies at the heart of the breaking of the seals. "When the Lamb opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour" (8:1). Why this silence – and in *heaven*? This is surely one of the most puzzling texts in all of scripture, springing an ambush on the most watchful interpreter.⁷³ To some interpreters the silence in heaven represents ominous calm in anticipation of the judgment that is to come with the horrors of the trumpet cycle – or with the shattering reality of final judgment.⁷⁴ Others are confident that there is silence in the sense that "the praises

⁷² This understanding of "Ἐρχου in Revelation has an analogy in the Gospel of John when Jesus during the Last Supper urges Judas to execute the logic of betrayal that has been allowed to fester in him (John 13:27).

⁷³ The breaking of the seventh seal follows the intercalation or interlude of Rev 7:1-17, describing the sealing of the believers in preparation for the final tribulation. In addition to standing apart from the breaking of the other seals, the report of its breaking is also the shortest.

⁷⁴ Mounce (*Revelation*, 179) sees the silence as "a dramatic pause which makes even more impressive the judgments about to fall upon the earth." To Beale (*Revelation*, 447), the silence signifies "the horror of divine judgment, which has such an awesome effect that no human is able to verbalize a response." Stefanovic (*Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 247) writes that "there is silence in heaven in the light

of the highest orders of angels are hushed that the prayers of *all* the suffering saints on earth may be heard before the throne.”⁷⁵ Still others, attempting to retain the sense of consummation that attends the breaking of the seventh seal, link the silence to creation, anticipating that the silence that, according to Jewish sources, existed before creation will be recapitulated in connection with the new creation.⁷⁶

Recalling the apprehension and suspense that are so marked at the presentation of the sealed scroll (5:1-4),⁷⁷ none of these alternatives seem entirely satisfactory. The scroll presents the council with a seemingly insoluble predicament, a veritable crisis in the divine government, highlighted by the tears of the Seer (5:4) and by the silence of everyone else (5:3). The breaking of the seals signifies that this predicament has been fully worked out, and with the breaking of the seventh seal comes a sense of closure to the heavenly council (8:1). Each seal is in itself a signifier of the nature of the predicament, reflecting various aspects of the “lamentation and mourning and woe” that described Ezekiel’s scroll (Ezek 2:10). The cry of the slain martyrs (6:9-10) further implies that God has fallen behind in upholding the moral order of the universe, but this troubling possibility is dwarfed by the impact of what is revealed as the means to set right what is wrong. If conditions in the world defy the expectation of one who has

of the final judgment to be executed on rebellious humanity.” Since these interpretations see judgment as the theme of the sealed scroll as well, judgment is not the novelty of the seventh seal. Instead, the silence is elicited by judgment that is unprecedented in severity and finality.

⁷⁵ Charles, *Revelation*, 224. This view is strongly supported by Bauckham (*Climax of Prophecy*, 70-83), who adduces additional evidence from rabbinic and non-canonical literature. This interpretation links the silence in heaven with the prelude to the trumpets (8:3-4), attenuating the sense of consummation that attends the breaking of the seventh seal. A variant view holds that the silence conforms to the known practice and terminology of sacrifice in the Jerusalem temple; cf. Peter Wick, “There Was Silence in Heaven (Revelation 8:1): An Annotation to Israel Knohl’s ‘Between Voice and Silence’,” *JBL* 117 (1998), 512-14.

⁷⁶ Cf. Roloff, *Revelation*, 101-2.

⁷⁷ “The mood is one of great solemnity and even dread;” cf. Tibor Fabny, *The Lion and the Lamb: Figuralism and Fulfilment in the Bible, Art and Literature* (London: Macmillan, 1992), 75.

staked his life on the notion that God is "holy and true" (6:10), the slaughtered Lamb is surely a solution fundamentally different from what is expected (5:6).⁷⁸ In this sense the predicament facing the heavenly council is less the state of the world in consequence of the war that began in God's immediate presence in heaven. Instead, the greater puzzle is the divine proposition regarding the means to make things right.

Only when the Lamb in its slaughtered state is allowed to exert a commanding influence on the entire scene will the representative biblical imagery for the silence in heaven receive its due.⁷⁹ The most suggestive passage in this respect,⁸⁰ as the present interpretation reads the evidence, is the text that sets the emotional and ideological tone for the notion of the slaughtered Lamb in the Old Testament.

Just as there were many who were astonished at him -- so marred was his appearance, beyond human semblance, and his form beyond that of mortals -- so he shall startle many nations; *kings shall shut their mouths because of him*; for that which had not been told them they shall see, and that which they had not heard they shall contemplate.

Isa 52:14-15

This is a text about silence -- the silence of shock and awe in the face of an entirely unexpected manifestation. Revelation presents an analogous situation when the

⁷⁸ The expectation-defying character of the scene is safeguarded by the pictures used in the narrative. The speaker heralds he one who will break the seals as "the Lion of the tribe of Judah," but the manifestation of this persona brings to light a Lamb violently slaughtered (5:5-6).

⁷⁹ Loren L. Johns, "The Lamb in the Rhetorical Program of the Apocalypse of John," *SBL Seminar Papers* 37 (1998), 2:778-79. "This scene, with its shocking switch of images, lies at the theological heart of the Apocalypse. From here on, the image of Christ as lamb serves as the dominant image for Christ." Cf. idem., *The Lamb in the Christology of the Apocalypse of John* (WUNT 2.167; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 159.

⁸⁰ A related and relevant perspective has been proposed by Kraft (*Offenbarung*, 132-33). He explicitly rejects the notion that the heavenly praise is hushed in order that the prayers of the saints may be heard, proposing instead that the silence prepares for a theophany and that the theophany in question is on the order of the revisionary theophany experienced by Elijah (1 Kings 19:11f.). This view is supported by Ulrich B. Müller (*Die Offenbarung des Johannes* [ÖTKNT 19; Gütersloh: Echter Verlag, 1984], 184-5), and it is strengthened by the association of silence with theophany in early Jewish thought; cf. Max Wilcox, "'Silence in Heaven' (Rev 8:1) and Early Jewish Thought," *Mogilany 1989. Papers on the Dead Sea Scrolls offered in Memory of Jean Carmignac* (ed. Zdzislaw J. Kapera; Krakow: The Enigma Press, 1991), 241-44.

heavenly council confronts a disclosure that defies expectations, but the relationship between these texts consists of more than an analogy. The startling nature of what is disclosed, causing kings to “shut their mouths because of him” according to Isaiah (Isa 52:15), belongs organically to the vision of the “lamb that is led to the slaughter” in the original Old Testament context (Isa 53:7).⁸¹ Moreover, both texts describe the fate of the Lamb, one anticipating it, the other one after the fact, in variant forms of the verb σφάζειν.

ἀρνίον ἐστηκὸς ὡς ἐσφαγμένον (Rev 5:6)

ὡς πρόβατον ἐπὶ σφαγὴν ἦχθη καὶ ὡς ἄμνος ἐναντίον τοῦ κείροντος αὐτὸν ἄφωνος (Isa 53:7, LXX)⁸²

The valence of this expression has been noted,⁸³ but it needs to be reemphasized.

On this point Loren L. Johns asserts that “the lamb is declared worthy precisely because

⁸¹ Old Testament scholars are virtually unanimous that the fourth Servant Song in Isaiah compasses Isa 52:13-53:12; cf. McKenzie, *Second Isaiah*, 129-36; Westermann, *Isaiah 40-66*, 253-69; Childs, *Isaiah*, 407-23. Thus, the relevant Old Testament pericope includes the awestruck silence of those who see the servant (Isa 52:13-14), the disfiguring of the servant (Isa 52:14), describing him again by the metaphor of the lamb led to the slaughter (Isa 53:7). In the present context the reaction of those who witness this is a vital ingredient, and the reaction is startled silence.

⁸² The Hebrew *וְכָרְחַל יוֹכֵל לִפְנֵי נְזִירָה נֶאֱלָמָה* correlates well with ὡς πρόβατον ἐπὶ σφαγὴν ἦχθη καὶ ὡς ἄμνος ἐναντίον τοῦ κείροντος αὐτὸν ἄφωνος in the LXX. The use of different nouns is not an important issue in view of Revelation’s likely allusion to the Hebrew text nor should it be seen as a problem that in Revelation it is the lamb and not the sheep that is slaughtered. It is likely that John has combined the most potent imagery, ‘lamb’ (vs. ‘sheep’) and ‘slaughtered’ (vs. ‘sheared’). More important is the fact that Revelation, like the LXX, has the verb σφάζειν. Holtz (*Die Christologie der Apokalypse*, 42-47) objects to this text as the source of the allusion in Revelation on the weak grounds that in Isaiah it is the sheep that is slaughtered and not the lamb, preferring instead the Passover lamb as the Old Testament antecedent. Fekkes (*Isaiah in Revelation*, 155-56) discounts that Isa 53:7 is in view because there is no other “Servant Christology” in Revelation and because he, too, finds the paschal lamb a better fit. However, if the slaughtered lamb in Revelation has Isa 53:7 in view, the commanding role of this image would be evidence that Revelation is saturated with Servant Christology. The textual basis for the view that the slaughtered lamb in Revelation primarily relates to the Passover lamb is not any stronger than the case for Isa 53:7, and it is arguably weaker if σφάζειν refers to violent slaughter in the context of martyrdom and if the stunned silence of those who witness this are included in the textual probe. An either-or proposition is unnecessary, and the objections noted are clearly influenced by the underlying soteriological premise of the authors. Bauckham (*Climax of Prophecy*, 215, 231) accepts a link between the metaphor of the slaughtered Lamb in Revelation (5:6) and the “lamb that is led to the slaughter” in Isaiah (Isa 53:7).

⁸³ Ford (*Revelation*, 90), as noted previously, seeing σφάζειν as a reference to violent slaughter.

it was slaughtered (5:9), and its having been slaughtered is an essential part of its identity (5:12; 13:8). The reference cannot be to the lamb as a sacrifice for sin in the sacrificial cult, *for the language is that of butchery and murder*, not ritual sacrifice.”⁸⁴ What leads to silence in the fourth Servant Song in Isaiah is precisely that the Servant has been violently abused – “so marred was his appearance, beyond human semblance, and his form beyond that of mortals” (Isa 52:14), and this reality lies behind the description of “a lamb that is led to the slaughter” (Isa 53:7). In the heavenly council there is silence, too, and the silence comes about when the council is brought face to face with the slaughtered Lamb, presented and acknowledged as the victor and revealer in the cosmic conflict.

For interpretations that insist that the seals must be broken before the contents of the scroll can be known, the logical next step is to expect disclosure of the hidden content, but where is the content?⁸⁵ Unlike the breaking of the first six seals, no event follows that is intrinsic to the seventh seal, and there is no reading of the content of the scroll. If there is an event, the event is silence itself. All the seals are broken, signifying that the issue confronting the heavenly council has been resolved by the Lamb. Silence in this context serves as the reflective corollary of praise, and in this sense the proposed idea of “rapturous amaze” may not be far off the mark.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ Johns, “The Lamb,” 780, emphasis added. Johns argues further that “σφάζω is the language of the slaughterhouse, while θύω, which does not appear in the Apocalypse, is the language of sacrifice” (*Ibid.*, 780, n. 61).

⁸⁵ Aune, as noted (*Revelation 6-16*, 507), sees the content of the scroll as Rev 8:2-22:5; Garrow (*Revelation*, 33, 124-25) as Rev 12:1-14:5. Stefanovic (*Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 42), who sees the sealed scroll as the Covenant Book, also believes that Revelation 12-22:5 “appears to be the disclosure of a part of the sealed scroll of Revelation 5.” It is quite possible to harmonize these views with the present interpretation but not because the scroll must be opened before its basic content can be ascertained.

⁸⁶ W. Ernest Beet, “Silence in Heaven,” *ExpT* 46 (1932), 76.

Conclusions

In the context of the cosmic conflict the mystery of the scroll that is sealed with seven seals (5:1) does not primarily refer to a document the content of which is unknown. Instead, the main predicament is a known reality that is not understood; a reality the understanding of which is decisive for the relationship between God and all created beings. Unsealing the scroll requires special qualities and qualifications (5:2), and these qualities are not found in any being "in heaven or on earth or under the earth" except in Jesus, represented as a slaughtered Lamb (5:3-6). His unsealing of the scroll should be not be seen as though the Lamb causes the things that are associated with each seal to happen but as proof that the Lamb successfully and persuasively explains the perplexing things that are known and the equally disconcerting things that come to light in the course of the unsealing. In this sense there is a close connection between the content of the scroll and the events accompanying the breaking of each seal (6:1-8:1). The slaughtered Lamb (5:6) reveals the character of God in the context of the cosmic conflict. For this reason there is a close connection between the Lamb that breaks the seals and the announcement of victory in the war in heaven (12:7-9).⁸⁷

Stating the problem of the sealed scroll in a series of negative propositions, the main concern is not whether God in his sovereign will makes certain events happen, or whether God is able to foretell a future yet unknown, or whether Christ is invested with the authority to execute God's will. When Revelation says that "no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it" (5:3), it does not only signify that other potential candidates for the task lack the Lamb's pedigree for this task in an ontological sense. Rather, it means that *absolutely no one else would have solved the cosmic conflict this way.*

⁸⁷ Bauckham (*Climax of Prophecy*, 186) aptly conflates the opening of the scroll (5:5-6) and the victory in the war in heaven (12:7-9).

With an eye on the role of the slaughtered Lamb in Revelation, Caird writes that "omnipotence is not to be understood as the power of unlimited coercion, but as the power of infinite persuasion, the invincible power of self-negating, self-sacrificing love."⁸⁸ The context of cosmic conflict gives this remarkable statement a reach that seems to go well beyond what may have been envisioned by its author.⁸⁹ What is revealed when the slaughtered Lamb breaks the seals may indeed be seen as an act of persuasion, but it is not to be seen primarily in contrast to the cruel and coercive ways of Roman imperial power.⁹⁰ Persuasion in this setting has a cosmic dimension, aiming not only to show that the cosmic conflict will not be won by force but also, and more importantly, to reveal the character of the divine government. The ceaseless acclaim of the heavenly beings proves that they, as witnesses to the conflict from its beginning, have been fully persuaded by the character and by the means of the One who sits on the throne (4:8-11; 5:9-14). If the theodicy in the book of Revelation is thought of in strict dictionary terms as "vindication of God's justice in tolerating the existence of evil,"⁹¹ God has, in the figure of the slaughtered Lamb, prevailed.

This reading of Revelation takes as its premise that "the Shining One" of Isaiah's poem (Isa 14:12) attempts to retain this characterization in a figurative sense in the cosmic conflict. When his true character comes to light in Revelation, however, he is shown to be the instigator of conflict, bloodshed, famine, death, and persecution, as demonstrated in the sequence of the seals (6:1-11), and as the agent of deathly poison

⁸⁸ Caird, *Revelation*, 75.

⁸⁹ This caveat is necessary because Caird (*Revelation*, 153), as noted, claims against the evidence of Revelation that "the Bible knows nothing of the premundane fall of Satan."

⁹⁰ The Roman counterpoint remains the predominant emphasis; cf. Russell Morton, "Glory to God and to the Lamb: John's Use of Jewish and Hellenistic/Roman themes in Formatting His Theology in Revelation 4-5," *JSNT* 83 (2001), 89-109.

⁹¹ *Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* (New York: Random House, 1997), 1335.

and demonic darkness as revealed in the sequence of the trumpets (see especially 8:10-11; 9:1-11). When this theme is resumed in the sequence of the bowls (16:2-21), the true character of the opposing side in the cosmic conflict is fully manifest, and the ultimate undoing of the losing side should be understood as an implosion.

But this view of the story line makes it important to articulate resolutely that victory in the cosmic conflict comes about because the divine character truly wins in a positive sense, not only that the opposing side loses. Even to interpreters who have little use for the personal agent of evil in Revelation and are still less disposed to pay attention to what he says, it ought to be more than a coincidence that the heavenly council in Revelation appears to revolve around the issue that frames the beginning of the biblical narrative. In the Garden of Eden God casts the character of the divine government in terms of freedom (Gen 2:16). When "the ancient serpent" has his turn, however, he insinuates deprivation of freedom as the hallmark of the divine regime (Gen 3:1).⁹² In the ensuing crisis of credibility the biblical narrative leaves no doubt that the serpent's proposition is accepted, promising greater freedom and a more exalted state of existence (Gen 3:1-6).

The all-absorbing issue facing the heavenly council in Revelation should also be construed in such a way that freedom is the issue on which the decision will turn. In the scroll that no one is worthy to open lays the evidence that freedom constitutes the basis of the divine government, precisely the opposite of the mudslinger's charge in the Garden of Eden.⁹³ Within the logic of freedom, working itself out in the transparency of an open system, "the ancient serpent" inexorably reveals his true character, and the

⁹² According to Moberly ("Serpent," 6), the thrust of the serpent's words was to depict God as a being who "is more interested in restriction than in freedom."

⁹³ Moberly ("Serpent," 6), as noted, points out that God's words in Genesis actually had emphasized freedom (Gen 2:16), but that the serpent tries to turn the provision of freedom into the reverse (Gen 3:1).

process happens precisely by the quality in God that the adversary has denied. Indeed, it is not the absence of freedom that troubles the heavenly council. Beneath the ringing affirmations of confidence in the divine government lies the tacit assumption that if there is a deficiency in the rule of the One who sits on the throne, it is an excess of freedom and the absence of the expected exercise of sovereign power (6:9-10) to the point that the divine commitment to freedom vastly surpasses what intelligent creatures were prepared to defend and explain (5:3). It may even be said that the scroll and the events accompanying the breaking of the seals lay the divine commitment to freedom on the line. In such a perception of the scroll, the issue faced by the heavenly council centres on the character of the divine government and the ways of the One who sits on the throne. The slaughtered Lamb that is worthy to take the scroll and break its seven seals embodies God's self-giving love made manifest in the interest of preserving the freedom of the universe. For this view of the problem, the unveiling of Revelation, like the breaking of the seals, does not primarily come in the form of seeing new realities but in the form of viewing familiar realities in a new way.

CHAPTER EIGHT

RETRACING THE STORY LINE OF REVELATION

The Beginning and the Ending

Unless Revelation differs fundamentally from other narratives, the reader is entitled to expect that the ending of its story is intimately related to how the story begins. Looking at how the plot is resolved at the end likewise leads to the belief that the problem that constitutes the plot is defined from the outset.

In Revelation the penultimate ending of the story describes the demise of the erstwhile "Shining One" in Isaiah's Old Testament poem (Isa 14:12), characterized by John as "the ancient serpent" and as "the deceiver of the whole world" (12:9; 20:2). Working from the assumption that Revelation ends on the subject matter that has been at the centre from the beginning, the present interpretation has sought to substantiate this expectation by reading the book backwards. This procedure has been adopted on the ground that interpretations of Revelation often fail to yield the expected narrative symmetry or even to read the story in such a way that the ending lives up to the promise that it, too, in the most literal sense becomes part of the promised revelation. Noting the bewilderment of many interpreters in the face of the ending, it does not seem unjustified to examine the story line in this manner, allowing the ending, the thrust of which is not in doubt, to shed new light on the beginning, about which there is considerable divergence of opinion.

In the foregoing, then, the story line in Revelation has been traced from its ending to the beginning, viewing the entire narrative through the prism of the war-in-heaven theme in Revelation 12. Reading the story the 'correct' way, in the normal narrative sequence from beginning to ending, cannot aspire to argue every point again

in detail. The basic soundness of the viewpoint that has been defended so far will be assumed, and the following re-reading will be limited to assessing, first, how a major structural and narrative ingredient, the cycles of seven, supports the proposed theme of cosmic conflict in the story line, and second, how the sealing of the believer (7:1-8) and the songs of vindication (5:8-14; 15:2-4) corroborate this theme.¹

The Cycles of Seven

The heavenly setting that introduces the main prophetic-apocalyptic section of Revelation (4:1-2) is also the setting for the remainder of the narrative (4:1-22:5). As noted, the close parallel between the seven trumpets and the seven bowls (16:2-21) exemplifies the thematic continuity between the first and the second half of Revelation. Again, it is easy to spot progression in extent, from “a *fourth* of the earth” in the seals’ cycle (6:7), to “a *third* of the earth” in the trumpet cycle (8:7), culminating in the bowl cycle in destruction that knows no limit (16:2-3). But the agency that has been determined for the trumpet cycle must not be forgotten when the bowl cycle closely recapitulates the trumpets. All three cycles unfold on the premise that a destructive power is at work, and that God is actively *holding back* the forces of evil.

Seal cycle

After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, *holding back* (κρατοῦντας) the four winds of the earth so that no wind could blow on earth or sea or against any tree (7:1).

Trumpet cycle

... I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar before God, saying to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, “*Release* (λῦσον) the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates” (9:13-14).

Bowl cycle

¹ These two passages do not exhaust the list of hymnic elements in Revelation which include 4:8-11; 5:2; 5:8-14; 7:10-12; 11:15-16; 12:10-12; 14:13; 15:3-4; 16:5-6; 19:1-8.

Then I saw another portent in heaven, great and amazing: seven angels with seven plagues, which are the last, for with them the wrath of God *is ended* (ἐτελέσθη; 15:1).²

Key expressions in these sequences show progression in the sense that evil is gaining ground because the restraining power lets go of its hold. The destructive forces are first *held back*, then *released*, and finally allowed to *culminate*. This suggests that the escalating encroachment of destructive forces reflects God's increasing absence. As the restraint is removed, evil literally comes to maturity. An active, demonic agency is particularly evident in the wake of the sixth bowl.

And I saw three foul spirits like frogs coming from the mouth of the dragon, from the mouth of the beast, and from the mouth of the false prophet. These are demonic spirits, performing signs, who go abroad to the kings of the whole world, to assemble them for battle on the great day of God the Almighty
Rev 16:13-14

Here the dragon is still active, pursuing his aim of bringing the ultimate deception to bear on whoever is susceptible. All restraint has been removed, and the demonic agency works its climactic deception in a world that is left without the benefit of divine protection. This process corresponds to A. T. Hanson's carefully argued dictum that when John speaks of the wrath of God, "he is *always* referring to the wrath process as worked out in history; he never uses these words in a purely eschatological sense."³ Moreover, the unambiguously demonic quality of the sixth bowl proves that the cosmic conflict provides the framework for the outworking of this process till the very end. When "the wrath of God" is shown to culminate in a display of power on the part of demonic agencies and in ever-increasing susceptibility to deception on the part

² The connotation of ἐτελέσθη (15:1) in this context is not only that the "wrath of God is *ended*" but also that there has been a long and painstaking progression toward the culmination. Translations differ in how this is conveyed; "the wrath of God is consummated" (NEB); "the wrath of God is finished" (NASB); "God's wrath is completed" (NIV); "they exhaust the anger of God" (NJB); "the final expression of God's anger" (GNB).

³ Hanson, *Wrath of the Lamb*, 164-65.

of those who live on the earth (16:13-14), it shows that the zenith of the demonic influence also marks its uncovering and presages its imminent undoing.

The Sealing of the Believer

The sealing of the believer (7:1-8) happens in the context of the cosmic conflict, the reality of which is recalled and magnified at each subsequent mention (9:4; 14:1; 22:4). Moreover, the sealing has a counterpart in the activity and the sign of the opposing side. "The seal of the living God" (7:2) that is placed on the foreheads of "the servants of God" (7:3) stands in contrast to "the mark of the beast" (τὸ χάραγμα τοῦ θηρίου, 16:2; 19:20) that is placed "on the right hand or the forehead" (13:16; 14:9) of those who accept the subversive delusion. Extending the reach of these metaphors even further and revealing their contrasting and competing significance still more, "the seal of the living God" (7:2) is shown to contain the name of God and of the Lamb (14:1; 22:4) just as "the mark of the beast" (16:2; 19:20) has "the name of the beast" (13:17), indeed, is "the mark of its *name*" (14:11).

The sealing of the believers is described initially in Rev 7:1-8 in "the intermission" between the breaking of the sixth and the seventh seal.⁴

After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth so that no wind could blow on earth or sea or against any tree. I saw another angel ascending from the rising of the sun, having the seal of the living God, and he called with a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to damage earth and sea, saying, "Do not damage the earth or the sea or the trees, until we have marked⁵ the servants of our God with a seal on their foreheads." Rev 7:1-3

⁴ 'Intermission' is clearly a misnomer as is 'intercalation,' both suggesting an interruption in the narrative or a pause in the unfolding drama even though what transpires during the 'intermission' is part of the drama and serves to raise the stakes in the evolving plot. Lohmeyer (*Offenbarung*, 67) appropriately calls the description of the sealing in Rev 7 "ein Zwischenstück," a connecting or middle piece between the sixth and the seventh seal.

⁵ The choice of "marked" in the NRSV is unfortunate because it carries less force than "sealed" and because it obscures the connection between the noun "seal" (σφραγίς) and the verbal action "to seal" (σφραγίζω). The NIV has "until we have put a seal" and the NKJV "till we have sealed."

"Holding back the four winds of the earth" has the connotation of a gathering storm that will not be indefinitely deferred. The proposed measure to be taken in the face of this possibility suggests that "the servants of God" are unprepared for the coming crisis. On these terms the sealing is a survival measure that is intended to bring about the necessary preparedness. Highlighting the solemnity of the occasion the seal is called "the seal of the living God," and the angel entrusted with the mission ascends "from the rising of the sun," a figure of speech that solemnizes the task and marks the extraordinary distinction of the messenger.⁶

In connection with the demonic horrors unfolding in connection with the fifth trumpet the sealing is recalled (9:4), and a clearer picture of its significance emerges. While the backward look to the sealing creates a powerful literary and thematic crosslink between the seal cycle and the seven trumpets, it also makes the reality of the cosmic conflict explicit, employing starkly evocative language in order to underscore what must be the issue in the conflict. As the star that had fallen from heaven opens "the shaft of the bottomless pit," darkness is shed abroad in the world (9:1-2). However, what begins as mere darkness materializes into physical expressions of horror and suffering so hideous that John, through the litany of his jarring pictures, conveys a reality that does not originate in the human realm whether in its conception or in its execution (9:3-11).

It is precisely in this context that the importance of the sealing comes into play. Revelation shows that the forces of darkness are unable to harm those who have been sealed. "They were told not to damage the grass of the earth or any green growth or any

⁶ Kraft (*Offenbarung*, 125) sees the messenger as a reflection of Christ ("ein Abbild Christi") that has the saving and preserving power of Christ as his mission.

tree, but only those people *who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads*" (9:4).

When John again uses the telltale ἐδόθη, writing that ἐδόθη αὐτοῖς ἵνα μὴ ἀποκτείνωσιν αὐτούς, ἀλλ' ἵνα βασανισθῶσονται μῆνας πέντε, the people who are at the receiving end of these sufferings are clearly those who have not been sealed (9:5). A literal and annotated translation of this statement reads that "it was *not* given to them [the demonic forces] that they [the demonic forces] should (ἵνα) kill them [those who are not sealed], but [it was given to them] that they [the demonic forces] should (ἵνα) torture them [those who are not sealed] for five months" (9:5).

Absorbing this description, interpreters are well advised to pause in order to reassess their options. Does ἐδόθη in this instance signify divine activity expressed with discretion out of reverence for the divine name? Whose intention is in view in the twice repeated ἵνα clauses?⁷ Who stands behind a programme that prefers protracted torture of the victim to execution? Who creates the state wherein which "people will seek death but will not find it; they will long to die, but death will flee from them"? (9:6). Is the demonic agency, the fallen adversary in the cosmic conflict, content to do only what God allows him to do in the sense that God's intention is actually in view, or is he allowed to carry out what he truly represents? In the context of the cosmic conflict the only possible answer must be the latter; it is the intention of the demonic power that finds such horrifying expressions, bringing suffering from which there is no escape and from which, crudely speaking, death even by one's own hand does not seem to be an option for the sufferer. The reality of cosmic conflict makes the ἵνα clauses, if purpose is in view at all, point to the purpose of the demonic agent, and it frowns on the tendency to confuse the issue to the point that God is made to be the one directly pulling the strings in order to make the reported horrors come about.

⁷ It is quite possible that these ἵνα clauses are not indicators of purpose and thus have the force of the infinitive; cf. Turner, *Grammar of New Testament Greek* IV, 151.

As noted already, the exaggerated language and overloaded symbolism in these descriptions strongly suggest that they are not primarily portraying physical suffering. Indeed, the initial qualitative colorization sees smoke coming out of the bottomless pit, "as the smoke of a great furnace; and the sun and the air were darkened by reason of the smoke of the pit" (9:2). The striking qualitative parameter intrinsic to the demonic activity is darkness that obscures the source of light. To the extent that darkness is seen as the controlling metaphor for the demonic activity, darkness also becomes the dominant cause of the suffering that is inflicted on those "who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads" (9:4). Since this means that the seal of God at the most basic level serves to protect the bearer against this darkness, it is clear that the seal cannot merely have a formal function. It must in some way be organically related to the issue that lies at the heart of the conflict, that is, the sealed are not hurt by the darkness because the seal on their forehead is not a superficial or merely external mark.⁸

This hypothesis is greatly strengthened when John, showcasing another link between the narrative that precedes Revelation 12 and the narrative that follows this chapter, makes it clear that to have "the seal of the living God" (7:2) actually is identical to having the name of God on the forehead (14:1; 22:4).⁹ Furthermore, the Lamb is once again in view, with the stable implication that having been slaughtered remains "an essential part of its identity."¹⁰ The seal specifically includes the Lamb; those who are sealed have "his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads" (14:1). By this token the divine name projects all that belongs to the slaughtered Lamb

⁸ Mounce (*Revelation*, 167) rejects interpretations that reduce the seal to a Christian initiation rite such as baptism. Aune (*Revelation 6-16*, 452) points out that the seal represents "the name of the Lamb and of his Father" (14:1, 22:4), and Beale (*Revelation*, 409) takes the objective of the sealing to be "not physical security but protection of the believers' faith."

⁹ Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 399-400.

¹⁰ Johns, "The Lamb," 780.

as an essential part of *its* identity, too. This name, already expressing the character of the person whose name it is and therefore to be seen as the hallmark of that person, relates in this context specifically to the aspect of God's character and government that is contested in the cosmic conflict.

The marking of the unbeliever is the counterpart to the sealing (13:16-17). Just as the seal of God contains the name of God and signifies what God is like in the context of the cosmic conflict, "the mark of the beast" (16:2; 19:20) conveys the essential character of the opposing power because it is "the mark of its *name*" (14:11). Acceptance of this mark protects its holder from the earthly sanctions imposed by the subversive triumvirate in the final stage of the cosmic conflict (14:9, 11; 16:2; 19:20), but it also promotes precisely the susceptibility to deception against which the seal of God is to protect.

Charles captures the background for the sealing with conceptual precision and legitimate rhetorical force when he sees the sealing take place just as "the Satanic host is about to make its final struggle for the mastery of the world."¹¹ Picturing a deceptive personification equipped "with all but almighty power,"¹² the approaching showdown makes "goodness and evil, righteousness and sin, come into their fullest manifestation and antagonism."¹³

Charles' treatment of this subject also extends to the sealing process itself, taking place "on the eve of this epiphany of Satan."¹⁴ By the sealing the believers are

¹¹ Charles, *Revelation* I, 205.

¹² Charles, *Revelation* I, 205.

¹³ Charles, *Revelation* I, 206.

¹⁴ Charles, *Revelation* I, 205.

secured – “not against physical evil, but – against the demonic world which is now coming into actual manifestation.”¹⁵

The faithful received the mark of God on their foreheads and were henceforth secured against satanic assaults in the form of deception and temptation to sin. But the unbelieving world, which had received the mark of the Beast, were thereby just as inevitably predisposed and prepared to become the victims of every satanic deceit and to believe a lie.¹⁶

The foregoing confirms that the sealing unfolds in the context of the cosmic conflict, is best explained by this theme,¹⁷ and leads to the full disclosure of the central contestants in the conflict – the *names* of the two sides. The purpose of the sealing is to protect against the darkness that lies at the core of the demonic deception. Preparedness for the final manifestation of evil in the cosmic conflict speaks yet again to what the present interpretation believes to be central to the message of Revelation, making discernment and appropriation essential ingredients to the meaning of the sealing. In

¹⁵ Charles, *Revelation* I, 243

¹⁶ Charles, *Revelation* I, 360. “We have here a deep spiritual truth,” writes Charles. “In the degree in which a man’s character approaches finality, he has in that degree, if he has been faithful, become one with God and been rendered secure against spiritual evil powers in whatever form. If, on the other hand, he has been faithless, he has in that degree by his own action predisposed and prepared himself to be at once the unconscious victim of further spiritual wrong and the helpless slave of evil powers” (*Ibid.*).

¹⁷ To leave out the perspective of cosmic conflict is to take out of the equation the most important element that lends depth and perspective to Revelation’s view of the wrath of God. This is particularly evident when, in connection with the dissolution occurring at the breaking of the sixth seal, people cry out to mountains and rocks to be hidden “from the face of the one seated on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb” (6:16), explaining that “the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand?” (6:17). Here the tendency is to leave only two participants on stage, the wrathful God and the terror-stricken human subject (cf. Beale, *Revelation*, 402). But the wrath of God is clearly worked out with three participants on stage, and it is the outworking of the programme of the missing third participant that comes to fearful fruition with the wrath of God. If ἡ ἡμέρα ἡ μεγάλη τῆς ὀργῆς αὐτῶν (6:17) in the sixth seal is set alongside those who have been delivered ἐκ τῆς θλίψεως τῆς μεγάλης (7:14), meaning the final demonic deception, the cosmic conflict and the trials brought by its climactic manifestation show that the point of the ordeal is not only to stand before God but to prevail through the consummation of the cosmic conflict. This view is confirmed when the sixth bowl, the penultimate bowl in the series of bowls that all deal with the wrath of God (15:1, 7; 16:1), shows the demonic agency at work mobilizing forces εἰς τὸν πόλεμον τῆς ἡμέρας τῆς μεγάλης τοῦ θεοῦ (16:14). In none of these instances does Revelation speak of only two participants.

the widest sense the sealing play acts what it means to grasp the concern of the book of Revelation and to appropriate its message.

The Hymns of Revelation

The present interpretation has already suggested that the hymns in Revelation must be heard against the background of cosmic conflict, taking the songs in the initial vision of the heavenly throne room as a case in point (4:8-11; 5:8-14). Since the hymnic passages focus on the same theme, they, too, show the book to be an integrated whole, supporting the thesis of thoroughgoing narrative continuity.¹⁸ Klaus-Peter Jörens demonstrates convincingly that the hymns do not reflect extraneous liturgical elements but are intrinsic to the story line, arising from the surrounding narrative and projecting back into the narrative a heightened sense of drama.¹⁹ As much as anything else in Revelation, the songs bear the marks of the author of the rest of the book.²⁰ It is not necessary to deny to the hymns a resemblance or even a counterpoint to Roman imperial court ritual²¹ in order to retain primacy for the biblical narrative as the decisive

¹⁸ Note a 'synoptic' perspective in 4:8-11; 5:2; 5:8-14; 7:10-12; 11:15-16; 12:10-12; 14:13; 15:3-4; 16:5-6; 19:1-8. Gerhard Delling ("Zum gottesdienstlichen Stil der Johannes-Apokalypse," *NovT* 3 [1959], 115, 118) suggests that later hymns assume the acclamation of worthiness of the first hymns (8:8-11; 5:8-14) and that praise grounded in the ways of God is the perspective of the later hymns in 15:3, 16:7, and 19:2.

¹⁹ Klaus-Peter Jörens, *Das hymnische Evangelium. Untersuchungen zu Aufbau, Funktion und Herkunft der hymnischen Stücke in der Johannesoffenbarung* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1971), 166.

²⁰ Jörens, *Das hymnische Evangelium*, 179. David R. Carnegie ("Worthy Is the Lamb: The Hymns in Revelation," in *Christ the Lord. Studies in Christology presented to Donald Guthrie* [ed. Harold H. Rowdon; London: Inter-Varsity Press, 1982], 246) argues that "the author has composed the hymns rather than taken them over." Jean-Pierre Ruiz ("Revelation 4:8-11; 5:9-14: Hymns of the Heavenly Liturgy," *SBL Seminar Papers* 1995, 216) likewise asserts that "it is far more likely that they are *ad hoc* compositions of the author."

²¹ David E. Aune, "The Influence of Roman Imperial Court Ceremonial on the Apocalypse of John," *BR* 28 (1983), 5-26; Ruiz, "Hymns of the Heavenly Liturgy," 216.

formative element. In terms of content the songs are full of Old Testament material,²² and it should be seen as more than a coincidence that they draw from Old Testament poems whose concern overlaps with the theme of Revelation.²³

Only when the contextual horizon of the hymns is taken to be the cosmic conflict – more than the claims of the Roman Empire – will the force of the hymnic portions be felt in full. The question asked in the opening scene in the heavenly throne room, “Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?” (5:2) sharply focuses the issue that is brought before the council and the plot of Revelation in a wider sense. It is in the heavenly setting and as an immediate response to this question that the first hymns in Revelation are sung. The pointed question indicates that the heavenly council is conscious of a problem. The members of the council cannot answer the call (5:3), but their silence does not mean that they do not *understand* the question. On the contrary, it is appropriate to read the scene as though the question merely condenses existing thoughts into words and verbalizes what is in the air, articulating with precision the felt crisis. This point can hardly be overemphasized. If modern interpretations, including the present attempt, stand perplexed before this scene, struggling to achieve even a minimal degree of consensus as to what it means, the scene in the heavenly throne room leaves the impression that those who are assembled there know all too well the problem

²² This is evident already in the initial hymn in Rev 4:8-11. Rev 15:3-4 will serve as an example in the present discussion, to be looked at in greater detail below.

²³ Aune (*Revelation 1-5*, 359) adduces the likely Old Testament sources for Revelation’s designation of hymns as “a new song” (5:9; 14:3). *New songs* in the Old Testament are found in Psalms 33:3; 40:3; 96:1; 98:1; 144:9; 149:1; Isa 42:10. The *new song* in Ps 33 claims that “the word of the Lord is upright, and all his work is done in faithfulness (πάντα τὰ ἔργα αὐτοῦ ἐν πίστει, LXX). He loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of the steadfast love of the Lord” (Ps 33:4-5). “I have not hidden your saving help within my heart,” says the speaker in Ps 40, “I have spoken of your faithfulness and your salvation; I have not concealed your steadfast love and your faithfulness from the great congregation” (Ps 40:10). In Ps 96 God “will judge the world with righteousness, and the peoples with his truth” (Ps 96:13). In Ps 98 “the Lord has made known his victory; he has revealed his vindication (ἀπεκάλυψεν τὴν δικαιοσύνην αὐτοῦ, LXX) in the sight of the nations” (Ps 98:2). In Isa 42 “he will faithfully bring forth justice” (Isa 42:3). In all of these songs there is a strong emphasis on the *how* of God’s ways. The key words and concepts in these songs are God’s אֱמוּנָה, אֱמֶת, צְדָקָה, מִשְׁפָּט, חֶסֶד, תְּשׁוּעָה, and יְשׁוּעָה, with אֱמוּנָה and אֱמֶת most prominent.

confronting the council. Moreover, if all interpretations must admit to uncertainty, no interpretation is more obligated to do so than the ones that tend to set the affirmations in the heavenly council mostly against the claims of the Roman Empire.²⁴

It is more likely, therefore, that the question asked in the heavenly council is conditioned by the cosmic conflict and thus to hear the hymns as responses to the solution that comes to light. These hymns belong in the sounding chamber of the cosmic conflict, with awareness of the aspiration of “the Shining One” (Isa 14:12-15). For this reason the hymns should be invested with a third dimension in addition to the antiphonal character and quality that Jörns’ work has demonstrated. He hears a voice of *proclamation* that seeks resonance in voices of *acclamation*,²⁵ but the full range of voices and sounds assumes a *triphonal* quality, distinguishing *three* voices and not only two. The third voice is implicit in the heavenly scenes, a mere whisper from off stage perhaps, but it is the remembered whisper of the opposing view that conditions the content and the fervour of what is affirmed in the songs in Revelation.²⁶ This understanding envisions a threefold sequence beyond the antiphony that is explicit in the hymns. The missing voice is the voice of *accusation* – followed and counteracted

²⁴ A case in point is found in Jörns’ careful assessment (*Das hymnische Evangelium*, 56-73) of the claim that the ἄξιός language in Rev 4:11 and 5:9, 12 derives from acclamation in the imperial cult. He concludes that the phrase ἄξιός ἐῖ λαβεῖν has no known counterpart in cultic or imperial rituals contemporary to John and that this expression, too, comes from the author’s own hand.

²⁵ Klaus-Peter Jörns, “Proklamation und Akklamation: Die antiphonische Grundordnung des frühchristlichen Gottesdienstes nach der Johannesoffenbarung,” in *Liturgie und Dichtung* (eds. H. Becker and R. Kaczynski; Sankt Ottilien: EOS Verlag, 1983), 187-208. Jörns sees this antiphonal or dialogical pattern within most of the hymns in Revelation. Kendra Jo Haloviak (“Worlds at War, Nations in Song: Dialogic Imagination and Moral Vision in the Hymns of the Book of Revelation,” Ph.D. dissertation, Graduate Theological Union, 2002) approaches the hymns as a vehicle that puts the reader in dialogue with the message of Revelation rather than focusing on the internal dialogue in the hymns, or, as understood here, the implicit *trialogue* within Revelation’s hymns. These perspectives are not mutually exclusive.

²⁶ In a real sense the third voice is explicit, too. Just as the four living beings in the first hymn in Revelation sing their song of praise “day and night without ceasing” (ἡμέρας καὶ νυκτός; 4:8), Satan has been the relentless accuser “day and night” (ἡμέρας καὶ νυκτός; 12:10). The third voice is maintained at full volume even upon Satan’s expulsion from heaven, expressing itself through the beast from the sea and voicing the familiar satanic sentiment, “It opened its mouth to utter blasphemies against God, blaspheming his name and his dwelling, that is, those who dwell in heaven” (13:6).

by the voices of proclamation and acclamation. Each instance of proclamation is predicated on a prior accusation, and each occasion of acclamation drives home the good news that the accusation has been overcome.

Hearing the hymns in this way invests them with a function that resonates with the narrative context of cosmic conflict, not primarily as indispensable elements in Revelation's soteriology, as suggested by Jörns,²⁷ or as a compelling feature of Revelation's wide-ranging Christology, as developed by Ford.²⁸ Instead, *theodicy* seems the more adequate term for the cosmic perspective of the story line that is expressed, refined, and resolved in the hymns.²⁹ What is proclaimed and affirmed in the hymns has a counterpoint in what has been denied by the adversary in the cosmic conflict. Performed by massive choirs in an ever widening circle of participants, the hymns convey a gripping response to what is revealed,³⁰ but the perception of what has come to light requires its own context of cosmic conflict to be fully appreciated. Likewise, "the hymns of the Apocalypse are essential to its very plot,"³¹ and the plot that provides the most adequate and full resonance for the hymns relate to the issues that lie at the heart of the cosmic conflict.

All these elements may be identified in "the song of Moses," the hymn that in the present context is thematically most striking.

²⁷ The soteriological emphasis is reflected in the title of Jörns' seminal work, that is, *Das hymnische Evangelium*.

²⁸ Josephine Massyngbaerde Ford, "The Christological Function of the Hymns in the Apocalypse of John," *AUSS* 36 (1998), 207-29.

²⁹ Carnegie ("Worthy Is the Lamb," 246-47) notes that the hymn in Rev 1:5b-6 is an exception to the theme of the other hymns, clearly 'soteriological' in content.

³⁰ Jörns, *Das hymnische Evangelium*, 167.

³¹ Ford, "Hymns in the Apocalypse," 211.

And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb.³²

“Great and amazing are your deeds,³³
Lord God the Almighty!³⁴
Just and true are your ways,³⁵
King of the nations!³⁶
Lord, who will not fear and glorify your name?³⁷
For you alone are holy.³⁸
All nations will come and worship before you,³⁹
for your judgments have been revealed.”⁴⁰

Rev 15:3-4

What the voices of proclamation assert and the voices of acclamation affirm, hearing this passage performed antiphonally, have all been contested by the voice of accusation. Every affirmation in the hymn may be correct in a generic and timeless sense, but in Revelation the song is sung in the context of the cosmic conflict. It comes at the end of a narrative that begins with the denial of every one of the virtues here attributed to God, a story that ends with every single accusation refuted by the evidence that has accumulated in the course of the revelatory process. A triphonal character in the song also makes allowance for the nagging perplexities that came to exist in the course of working out the solution that those who sing the song have come to appreciate and acclaim. If the greater issue underlying the hymn is the demonic charge that these claims on God's behalf are false, the lesser concern echoed throughout the biblical

³² Lohmeyer (*Offenbarung*, 131) has proposed convincing Old Testament antecedents for each of the lines in the hymn. His suggestions are reproduced in the footnotes below.

³³ Ps 111:2 (110:2, LXX); Ps 139:14 (138:14, LXX).

³⁴ Amos 4:13.

³⁵ Deut 32:4.

³⁶ Jer 10:7.

³⁷ Jer 10:7.

³⁸ Ps 22:3 (21:4, LXX). This text is not on Lohmeyer's proposed list.

³⁹ Ps 86:9 (85:9, LXX).

⁴⁰ Deut 32:4.

narrative is that there have been times when these claims have seemed doubtful. All of the above certainly makes the hymn somewhat more than “a jubilant anthem of Christian optimism.”⁴¹

The constituent elements in this hymn are, as noted, all taken from the Old Testament.⁴² Searching for a dominant element within the Old Testament background, the tendency has been to favour the song of victory in Exodus 15.⁴³ On this point the present interpretation finds a more persuasive case in ‘the song of Moses’ in Deuteronomy 32.⁴⁴ It, too, is ‘a song of Moses’ (Deut 31:22, 30; cf. Ex 15:1). Moreover, it is described as a song that Moses is commissioned to write (Deut 31:19), a charge perceived by him to be a matter of such urgency that he proceeds to do it “that very day” (Deut 31:22). While little by way of content within “the song of Moses” in Revelation is directly related to Exodus 15, important elements in Revelation come unmistakably from Deuteronomy.

θεός ἀληθινὰ τὰ ἔργα αὐτοῦ καὶ πᾶσαι αἱ ὁδοὶ αὐτοῦ κρίσεις
θεὸς πιστός καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν ἀδικία δίκαιος καὶ ὅσιος κύριος
Deut 32:4, LXX

It is a crucial feature of the hymn in Revelation that it does not just celebrate God’s *victory*. Above all, it is a hymn praising God’s *ways*,⁴⁵ and this aspect of the hymn is supplied by the song of Moses in Deuteronomy. Indeed, the emphasis on God’s ways that lies at the heart of what is revealed is echoed in the hymns. Moreover,

⁴¹ Caird, *Revelation*, 198.

⁴² Caird (*Revelation*, 198) calls the hymn “a cento of quotations from many parts of the Old Testament.”

⁴³ Bauckham (*Climax of Prophecy*, 306) dissenting with interpreters who treat the hymn as “a medley of Old Testament phrases,” sees in it a sustained exposition of the victory song in Exodus 15. Roloff (*Revelation*, 183), agreeing that Exodus 15 is in view, nevertheless sees little in the content of the hymn that reminds of Exodus, and Beale (*Revelation*, 794) notes that “the actual contents of the song itself come not from Exodus 15 but from passages throughout the OT extolling God’s character.”

⁴⁴ Dellling, “Zum gottesdienstlichen Stil der Johannes-Apokalypse,” 118.

⁴⁵ Charles (*Revelation*, II, 34) emphasizes that praise and not victory is tenor of the hymn.

it has already crystallized that God's ways in the cosmic conflict are completely contrary to expectations (5:6). Such a conditioning lies behind the Moses figure in Deuteronomy, pointing to his dismissal as a leader and his exclusion from the promised land for failing to keep faith with God's ways (Num 20:8-12; Deut 1:37; 3:23-26; 4:21; 32:51-52).⁴⁶ This song, commissioned by God and executed with a sense of urgency, could therefore be seen as a song that has internalized the most compelling feature of the Mosaic biography: his own deeply etched experience and the subsequent struggle to come to grips with God's ways (Deut 3:23-26).

On the basis of the foregoing there is no reason to share Charles' despair that "the expression τὴν ᾠδὴν Μωϋσέως...καὶ τὴν ᾠδὴν τοῦ ἀρνίου creates insuperable difficulties."⁴⁷ The difficulty is resolved if "the song of Moses" is personalized to reflect Moses' experience of God's ways as it is evoked throughout Deuteronomy and as it conditions the song coming at the end. That "song of Moses" stands as his legacy. In the context of Revelation, τὴν ᾠδὴν Μωϋσέως...καὶ τὴν ᾠδὴν τοῦ ἀρνίου belong together in the sense that they represent the combined legacy of Moses and the legacy of the slaughtered Lamb. For the same reason Beale seems correct in seeing the song in Revelation as one song, reading καὶ as epexegetical with the meaning "the song of Moses, the servant of God, that is, the song of the Lamb" (15:3).⁴⁸ Even the possible constellation of consecutive subjective genitives in this phrase, awkward at first sight, should not be easily dismissed.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ This is the story of Moses' anger in the face of the faithlessness and intransigence of the people. The prominence of this story in Deuteronomy is remarkable, including the inclusion of Moses' rejected plea to have the verdict reversed (Deut 3:23-26).

⁴⁷ Charles, *Revelation*, II, 34; cf. Delling, "Zum gottesdienstlichen Stil der Johannes-Apokalypse," 118.

⁴⁸ Beale, *Revelation*, 792.

⁴⁹ Aune (*Revelation 6-16*, 872-3) and Beale (*Revelation*, 793) point out that whereas "the song of Moses" unquestionably is "the song by Moses," there is reluctance to follow through and make τὴν

The context of cosmic conflict lends depth to the many hymnic elements in Revelation, and these hymns in return add to the explanatory power of the conflict theme for Revelation as a whole. The focus of the hymns is firmly fixed on God's ways, seen to be the contested issue in Revelation. Like the sealing, the hymnic elements emphasize the importance of discernment, appropriation, and internalization (14:3).⁵⁰

Conclusion

The emerging story line in the present reading of Revelation does not prove that Revelation is more easily understood when read backwards, but it helps break up entrenched readings that tend to treat the cosmic aspect of the conflict in Revelation as mere background noise. As to the specific difference sought here, it asks that justice be done to the theme of cosmic conflict, seizing upon striking elements in the latter half of Revelation in order to facilitate the grasp of this theme for the book as a whole.

Second, the projection of the cosmic conflict onto a larger narrative screen leads to greater clarity and commends itself simply by providing a better and more fitting explanation of the symbolic and biblically charged language of Revelation. A third objective, implied in the two previous ones, is to read Revelation in a way that enables the reader at the end to achieve a satisfactory resolution of the plot.

Working from the assumption that the ending of Revelation meaningfully mirrors the beginning of the book and *vice versa*, it is appropriate to return to the binding and release of Satan (20:1-10) with which the present study of the story line

ὁδὸν τοῦ ἀρνίου "the song *by* the Lamb" or "the song sung *by* the Lamb." Since no song *by* the Lamb is known to exist, the subjective genitive reading is held in abeyance. The two phrases may retain the same genitival valence with the figurative reading of 'legacy'.

⁵⁰ Cf. Jean-Pierre Ruiz, "The Politics of Praise: A Reading of Revelation 19:1-10," *SBL Seminar Papers* 1997, 377-78.

began. Why does Revelation say of Satan that after his confinement “he *must* (δεῖ) be let out for a little while”?⁵¹

The theme of cosmic conflict in Revelation provides as a minimum three significant parameters for this late and unexpected twist in the story that may at least make the release of Satan a little less puzzling. The first is that the persona whose release is reported was at one time known as “the Shining One” (Isa 14:12) and as the “covering cherub” (Ezek 28:14). His ending in Revelation is so painstaking as to suggest that it comes only with great reluctance, and only because the fallen adversary himself initiates the actions that bring it about (20:8).

The second element emphasized in the story line of Revelation is that the programme of “the Shining One” has been concealed in deception, retaining this characteristic till the very end (20:3, 8).⁵² This, indeed, may be the most distinctive feature of the story line in this thesis because it invests the original and actual words of “the ancient serpent” with explanatory power in the context of Revelation. Even within the constraints of the most literalistic reading of the binding and subsequent release of Satan it may be inferred that the fallen adversary is not left in a legal no man’s land.⁵³ As has been the case through the identification of the deceiving and destroying agent in the cycles of the seals, the trumpets, and the bowls, in the action necessitating the sealing, in the accusing voice from off-stage that underlies the hymnic portions, and above all in the attempt to devour the child born to the woman in Revelation 12 (12:4), the deceiver’s true character has become manifest, and his final move compounds and

⁵¹ μετὰ ταῦτα δεῖ λυθῆναι αὐτὸν μικρὸν χρόνον (20:3).

⁵² Bøe (*Gog and Magog*, 256) writes that “to deceive, πλανᾶω, is a central term in Revelation. It sums up in one word loaded with meaning the complex enterprises of Satan.”

⁵³ This idea corresponds to what Gustav Aulén (*Christus Victor: An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of Atonement* [trans. A. G. Hebert. London: SPCK, 1931, repr. Wipf and Stock Publishers, nd], 28, 45) puts at the centre of ‘the classical view’ of the atonement. Taking his point of departure in Irenaeus, God is seen to observe “the rules of fair play.”

completes the evidence. The δεῖ points to the logic that the deceiver must in a real sense work out his own demise.

This understanding leads to a third feature in the story line that frames the release of Satan. When the voice of “the ancient serpent” is heard in Genesis, it charges deprivation of freedom as the fundamental characteristic of the divine government (Gen 3:1), subverting the claim that freedom is the quintessence of God’s regime and basic to the divine-human relationship (Gen 2:16). Freedom, the present interpretation contends, expresses the issue before the council in the heavenly throne room better than sovereignty (5:1-3) even though readings that emphasize sovereignty vastly outnumber this view. While sovereignty and freedom are not mutually exclusive, it is the logic of freedom that leads to Satan’s release, and it is within the logic of freedom, precisely the value said to be lacking in the divine character, that Satan proceeds to work his definitive undoing (20:7-9).

The foregoing, then, focusing on the characters and the plot of what is a cosmic crisis, is the story line within which this thesis will search out the meaning of ἡ πίστις Ἰησοῦ.

Part Three

The Meaning of *Pistis Iesou* in Revelation

CHAPTER NINE

PISTIS IESOU: LITERARY AND STRUCTURAL CONSIDERATIONS

Introduction

The emphatic statement, Ὡδε ἡ ὑπομονὴ τῶν ἁγίων ἐστίν, οἱ τηροῦντες τὰς ἐντολάς τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὴν πίστιν Ἰησοῦ (Rev 14:12), sets up a striking criterion for appropriating the message of Revelation. Elements of style, structure, and emphasis that lie on the surface of the text justify this assessment, and it is corroborated further by the heightened momentum of the story line in the immediate context of the verse. The present chapter will make important preliminary observations about the text and the structure of the section in which it is found. The following chapter will then turn directly to the meaning of the expression ἡ πίστις Ἰησοῦ in this text and in relation to similar terms in Revelation. A critique of the most widely accepted interpretation of this section is left for Appendix One, aiming to demonstrate that the theme of cosmic conflict remains undiminished. Appendix Two, also important, seeks to draw out theological implications, paying special attention to the result of reading Revelation as a theodicy.

Preliminary Impressions

Important clues to what this verse (14:12) aspires to accomplish are suggested by its unmistakable dialogical and exclamatory flavour, heralded by Ὡδε. Vanni, as noted earlier, includes this text as one of his examples of “liturgical dialogue” in Revelation,¹ but the dialogical character persists even if “liturgical” is dropped from the term. A

¹ Vanni, “Liturgical Dialogue,” 365-66. Similar exclamatory phrases are found in Rev 13:9-10; 13:18; and 17:9.

liturgical reading might indeed assign this verse to a reader other than the main narrator in order to let loose the pent-up quest for listener response in the text.² On its first reading in the churches, however, one must picture the single reader, guided by the word ὡδε, to pause at this point in his reading. The pause carves out rhetorical space commensurate with the importance of the message, conveying a sense of immediacy to the listener and investing the text with an exclamatory and imperative thrust.³ The force of ὡδε is to ensure attentiveness,⁴ and the break in the narrative is not an accident owing to textual transposition, as suggested by Charles,⁵ or an afterthought resulting in an editorial gloss, as indicated by Aune.⁶ Instead, ὡδε signifies a point of emphasis, and it is quite appropriate to regard it as the “punch line” of the preceding account.⁷

This perception leads to a second and closely related idea that flows naturally from the dialogical quality of the text. If the dialogue in itself is a participatory feature on the verbal level, the aim is to elicit application not in reading only but by translating the theology of Revelation into action. Aune observes that Revelation 14:12 “is a

² The revised 2001 printing of Nestle-Aland makes Revelation 14:12 part of the proclamation of the third angel. It seems more likely that this verse belongs to the exhortation of the narrator, emphasizing appropriation and listener response even though assigning it to the angel invests the statement with great authority.

³ Jan Lambrecht (“Rev 13,9-10 and exhortation in the Apocalypse,” in *New Testament Textual Criticism and Exegesis. Festschrift J. Delobel* [ed. A Denaux; BETL 161; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2002], 345) notes that “the angel no longer speaks. John himself addresses the readers.” Likewise, Daria Pezzoli-Olgiati (“Between Fascination and Destruction. Considerations on the Power of the Beast in Rev 13:1-10,” in *Zwischen den Reichen: Neues Testament und Römische Herrschaft*, [eds. Michael Labahn and Jürgen Zangenberg; TANZ 36; Tübingen: Francke Verlag, 2002], 232) agrees that in the ὡδε-sayings the narrative is interrupted by a direct exhortation to the reader.

⁴ Lambrecht (“Rev 13,9-10,” 345) sees the ὡδε-sayings in Revelation as striking rhetorical markers containing “a scarcely hidden call to attention.”

⁵ Charles, *Revelation*, I, 368.

⁶ Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 837-8.

⁷ G. R. Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation* (NCBC; Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publ. Co., 1983), 226-27.

parenthetic saying introduced by ὡδε,⁸ and its status in the book is magnified by his contention that the function of apocalypses is to encourage behavioural change.⁹ This qualitative measure prevails over the modest role of this verse in quantitative terms, and in this sense ὡδε signifies that we have come to the take-home message of the book, or at least to the take-home message of the section of the book that forms the context of this verse.¹⁰ The sender of the letter is at pains to help the listener get it right, specifying his concern by describing those who appropriate the message as οἱ τηροῦντες τὰς ἐντολὰς τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὴν πίστιν Ἰησοῦ. What this expression entails requires in-depth study, but there can be no doubt that it has to do with retaining the significance of the previous narrative in practical terms.

Third, this verse and the expression ἡ πίστις Ἰησοῦ are structurally integral to the central section of Revelation and the theme of cosmic conflict. While the boundaries of this section may vary among interpreters, the consensus is quite exceptional on this point.¹¹ Revelation 12 constitutes the structural and thematic centre, and the verse in question belongs to this section. More is claimed in this respect by

⁸ Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 798.

⁹ Aune ("Genre," 90) expresses the conviction that "apocalypses are basically ideological, and are basically paraenetic even though the specifically paraenetic features appear at first sight to be in short supply."

¹⁰ BDAG (art. ὡδε, 1101) shows that while ὡδε in its primary sense denotes location, in Rev 14:12 the sense is figurative, an indicator of emphasis in view of the circumstances just defined. Thus, ὡδε means "in this case, at this point, on this occasion, under these circumstances."

¹¹ A sample of some important proposed structurings of Revelation shows wide divergence of opinion except that the section in question is a stable and central ingredient in most schemes, though varying somewhat in terms of where the cut-off points should be. Minear (*I Saw a New Earth*, 105-29) has a division that makes Rev 14:12 part of the section that covers 11:19-15:4. Mounce (*Revelation*, 48) limits this section to 12:1-14:5, positing 14:6-20 as interlude. Jon Paulien ("The Role of the Hebrew Cultus, Sanctuary, and Temple in the Plot and Structure of the Book of Revelation," *AUSS* 33 [1995], 248), citing a number of prior studies in support of his own view, has a mid-point that encompasses 12:1-15:4. Bauckham (*Climax of Prophecy*, 15) views chapters 12-14 as a unity. Schüssler Fiorenza (*Revelation*, 175-76), as noted previously, sees a chiasmic structure that allocates the centre to Rev 10:1-15:4, while Beale (*Revelation*, 131) limits the centre to Rev 11:19-14:20. The central one of Aune's seven sections (*Revelation 1-5*, c-cv) covers 11:15-16:21. Lambrecht ("Structuration," 86) treats chapters 12-14 as an intercalation that is integral to the seventh trumpet, the whole section extending from 11:15-16:1.

Lohmeyer, who takes chapter 14 on grounds of form and content to be “the high point of the Apocalypse.”¹² Bowman goes even further, suggesting that John intended the contents of chapter 14 “to represent in some sense the climax of his theme toward which all that precedes builds up and from which all that is subsequent falls away.”¹³ Whether or not these views are justified, they certainly do not detract from the importance of this chapter or from the verse that aims to bring the message home to the listener.

As noted previously, Revelation 12 describes the cosmic conflict in three interrelated phases (12:1-6; 12:7-12; 12:13-17). In the third phase of the conflict, the dragon, conscious that “his time is short” (12:12), makes an all-out attempt to destroy “the woman who had given birth to the male child” (12:13). When what appears to be a direct assault is thwarted (12:14-16), the dragon falls back on more subtle means. This is the implication of the disclosure that the dragon ἀπῆλθεν ποιῆσαι πόλεμον μετὰ τῶν λοιπῶν τοῦ σπέρματος αὐτῆς (12:17). The decisive word is ἀπῆλθεν, signifying “motion away from a reference point with emphasis upon the departure,”¹⁴ or simply to “go away, depart, with no indication of place.”¹⁵ Thus the statement that the dragon “went off” (12:17, NRSV) carries the connotation of a vanishing act, departing the scene for the purpose waging war by different means.¹⁶ The chosen method comes to view in the next chapter in the beast arising from the sea (13:1) and the lamb-like beast arising from the earth (13:11). By the twin strategy of deception (13:3, 13-14) and

¹² Lohmeyer, *Offenbarung*, 119.

¹³ Bowman, “Revelation to John,” 446.

¹⁴ Louw-Nida, *Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 15.37, 1:187; cf. BDAG, art. ἀπέρχομαι, 102.

¹⁵ BDAG, art. ἀπέρχομαι.

¹⁶ Minear (*I Saw a New Earth*, 118) asks perceptively, “How shall he regain the initiative? He needs reinforcements. Standing on the beach, he therefore summons a beast from the sea, his first *alter ego*.”

coercion (13:7, 15) the triumvirate of the dragon and the two beasts achieve stupendous success among the inhabitants of the earth (13:7-8, 14, 17). Commenting on the portrayal of this offensive, Rissi asserts that “nowhere else in the New Testament is the image of the satanic powers maintained in such minuteness of detail and inner compactness.”¹⁷

Revelation 14 brings to light the measures that are taken to counter the aims of the dragon and the two beasts (14:1-20), showing that the satanic subversion is not left to unfold without any intervention on God’s part.¹⁸ The intervention takes the form of three angels “flying in midheaven” (14:6-11), commissioned to break the world’s enchantment with the counterfeit triad.¹⁹ The most important point to observe is that these heaven-sent messengers do not speak into a vacuum or in a setting where God is the only party with which to reckon. Their mission takes place in the context of the cosmic conflict, with the moves and aspirations of the opponent firmly in view. In these chapters Revelation portrays in astounding detail the parties in the conflict as they progress inexorably toward the decisive showdown according to the logic of their respective programmes. Just as the force of ὧδε must be “under these circumstances,”²⁰ meaning the cosmic conflict and the issue that is brought to a climax in the closing

¹⁷ Rissi, *Time and History*, 69.

¹⁸ William G. Johnsson, “The Saints’ End-Time Victory Over the Forces of Evil,” in *Symposium on Revelation – Book II* (ed. Frank B. Holbrook; Silver Spring, Md.: Biblical Research Institute, 1992), 5. In Revelation 13 the beast rising from the earth causes everyone to be marked with a χάραγμα “on the right hand or on the forehead” (13:16), effectively ostracizing those who do not have τὸ χάραγμα (13:17). The divine response in Revelation 14 has τὸ χάραγμα as a point of reference for its message and emphasis (14:9, 11), retaining the focus on the demonic subversion and its χάραγμα for the remainder of the conflict (16:2; 19:20; 20:4).

¹⁹ The counterfeit character of the subversive ‘trinity’ has been pointed out repeatedly; cf. Boring, *Revelation*, 154; Metzger, *Breaking the Code*, 75; Resseguie, *Revelation Unsealed*, 49.

²⁰ BDAG s.v. ὧδε 2.

confrontation, the expression ἡ πίστις Ἰησοῦ rises from the story line of Revelation and receives its primary conditioning from the evolving theme.

The essential features and structure of Revelation 12-14 may now be summarized, observing the difference between narrative sequence and chronological progression.²¹

Narrative sequence

Revelation 12

- Birth of male child (12:1-6)
- War in heaven (12:7-12)
- Dragon's pursuit of woman (12:13-18)

Revelation 13

- Beast from the sea (13:1-10)
- Beast from the earth (13:11-18)

Revelation 14

- The Lamb on Mount Zion (14:1-5)
- The three angels' messages (14:6-12)
- The harvest (14:13-20)

Chronological progression

Revelation 12

- War in heaven (12:7-12)
- Birth of male child (12:1-6)
- Dragon's pursuit of woman (12:13-18)

Revelation 13

- Beast from the sea (13:1-10)
- Beast from the earth (13:11-18)

Revelation 14

- The three angels' messages (14:6-12)
- The harvest (14:13-20)
- The Lamb on Mount Zion (14:1-5)

The profusion of detail and symbolism in these chapters,²² exacerbated by a plethora of proposed interpretations and applications,²³ can easily obscure the thematic continuity that is the warrant for seeing in Revelation 14:12 the take-home message of

²¹ The chronological progression differs from the narrative sequence on at least two points in this section, first, with respect to the war-in-heaven theme (12:7) that lays down the premise for the entire conflict depicted in this section, and, second, with respect to the author's decision to portray the victorious remnant (14:1-5) *before* the description of the final proclamation (14:6-12) and the harvest (14:13-20). The latter example shows clearly that the narrative in Revelation does not evolve in a linear, chronological sequence. As argued earlier, the primordial beginning of the cosmic conflict is assumed even if John conflates the beginning and the decisive turning point in the conflict, telling it from the point of view of the heavenly triumph (12:7-12).

²² In addition to the general features of the two beasts in Revelation 13, there are specific enigmas such as "the image of the beast" (13:14-15), the mark of the beast (13:16-17), and the cryptic number of the beast, 666 (13:17-18).

²³ Thus, "it may well be that more ink has been spilled over this chapter [Revelation 13] than over any other chapter in the New Testament;" cf. William Barclay, "Great Themes of the New Testament. Revelation xiii," *ExpT* 70 (1959), 260.

these chapters. Repetitions within the text mute this risk somewhat by carefully highlighting the contested value in the conflict.

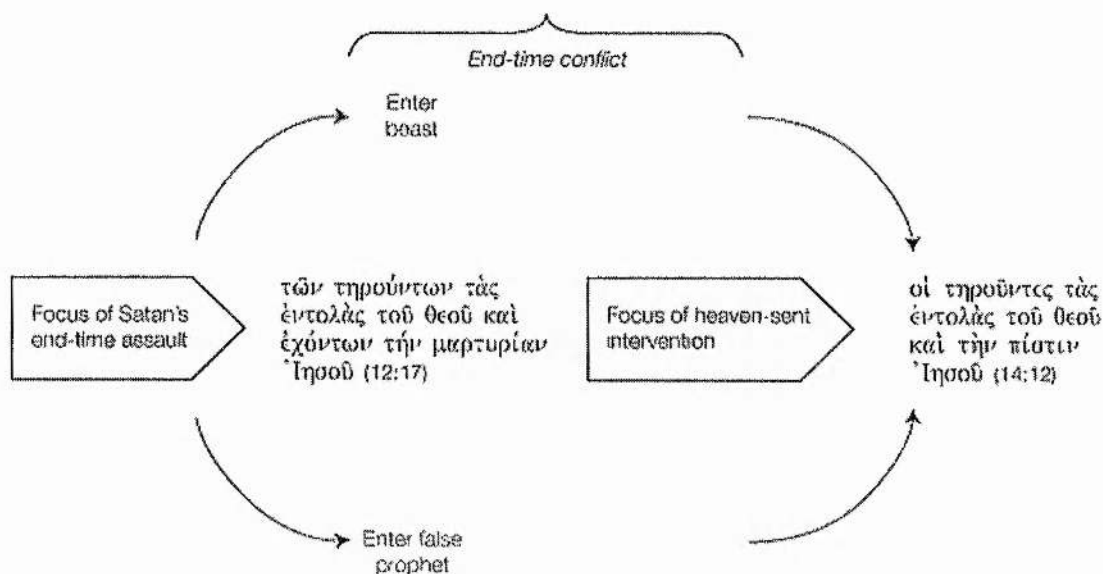
Rev 12:17

τῶν τηρούντων τὰς ἐντολὰς τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ ἔχόντων τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ.

Rev 14:12

οἱ τηροῦντες τὰς ἐντολὰς τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὴν πίστιν Ἰησοῦ.

The significance of these characterizations stands out even more strikingly in a modified version of the illustration that has been used previously, this time giving priority to the issue in the conflict.²⁴

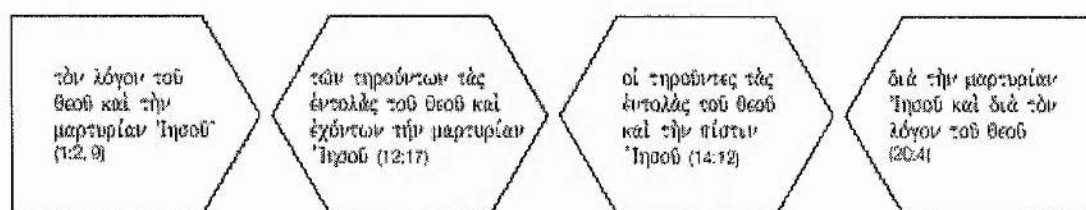


The thematic continuity is evident. As the illustration shows, the two sides are in agreement as to what constitutes the issue at the heart of the conflict. What for one side is the target of implacable enmity is for the other side the object of solicitous care. Each side appears to read from the same script even though their objectives are completely at odds. In fact, the verse in question (14:12) conveys something more than a concluding exhortation of the preceding narrative. When held in unity with the

²⁴ The illustration makes it appear that the beast from the sea (13:1-10) and the beast from the earth (13:11-18) appear simultaneously, reflecting the commonly held view that these symbols represent the imperial government and the imperial cult. However, on the basis of the narrative parameters in Revelation 13 a sequential appearance may have stronger merit. In Revelation 14, describing the divine response to the crisis created by the subversive triumvirate, there is little doubt that the three heaven-sent messengers are sequential.

mention of those who keep τὰς ἐντολὰς τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ ἔχόντων τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ (12:17), these statements, both appositional phrases in their native context, distil and crystallize the issue in the conflict and thus bring clarity to what is at stake.

These expressions connect to a web of related phrases throughout Revelation, giving them a representative character with respect to the message of the entire book. In the prologue John writes that he “testified to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ” (1:2), and he specifies in similar-sounding language that he “was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus” (1:9). Those who come to life in the first resurrection (20:6) are those who have been beheaded because of “the testimony of Jesus and the word of God” (20:4). Here the expression “the word of God and the testimony of Jesus” at the beginning of Revelation (1:2, 9) and the phrase “the testimony of Jesus and the word of God” (20:4) at the end of the book constitute an inclusio, indicating a central concern of the author. Moreover, these expressions lie close to “the commandments of God and ...the testimony of Jesus” (12:17) and “the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus” (14:12) that loom so large in the middle section. While these expressions shed light on each other and signify a deliberate thematic continuity throughout the book, they also link the example of those who have appropriated the message of the book to those who are urged to do so.²⁵



²⁵ See Revelation 1:2, 9; 6:9; 12:17; 13:10; 14:12; 19:10; 20:4; 22:9.

The foregoing has been limited to establishing the importance of the phrase ἡ πίστις Ἰησοῦ in terms of the style and the structure of the verse where it occurs, noting the relationship to the theme of cosmic conflict and the emphasis on appropriation. Before proceeding to explore the possible meanings of the phrase itself, it is necessary to reiterate the contention that the Old Testament grounding of the story line is primary and more decisive than the realities of the Roman Empire for the interpretation of Revelation (see Appendix I). John's vision of the beast from the sea (13:1-10) and his description of the beast from the earth (13:11-18) lie directly in the path between the cosmic conflict in Revelation 12 and the subsequent climactic exhortation pointing to ἡ πίστις Ἰησοῦ (14:12). Since these descriptions to some interpreters represent incontrovertible evidence for the pre-eminence of the Roman Empire in Revelation,²⁶ the interpretation of this section must not be allowed to eclipse the theme of cosmic conflict and thus to limit the range of options for the meaning of ἡ πίστις Ἰησοῦ.

²⁶ Cf. Bousset, *Offenbarung*, 120.

CHAPTER TEN

THE MEANING OF *PISTIS IESOU* IN REVELATION

Outlining the Options

Major English translations of ἡ πίστις Ἰησοῦ (14:12) offer three main options for this expression, “the faith of Jesus,”¹ “faith in Jesus,”² and “faithful to Jesus.”³ The same three options are also represented in German⁴ and French translations.⁵ Commentaries argue in support of one or the other of these choices, some more in depth than others.⁶

¹ “The faith of Jesus” is the choice of the KJV (1611/1769), the Douay-Rheims American Edition (1899), ASV (1901), Moffat (1926), RSV (1952), NRSV (1989), and NKJV (1992).

² “Faith in Jesus” is the choice of Phillips (1959), the NASB (1977), NJB (1985), and NAU (1995).

³ “Faithful to Jesus” or “loyal to Jesus” is the preference of the NEB (1976), GNB (1976), and NIV (1984).

⁴ All three options are represented in German versions. Luther’s translation (1545) has “den Glauben an Jesum” and the 1984 revision “den Glauben an Jesus” (‘faith in Jesus’). The Elberfelder translation (1905) and its revision (1993) prefer “den Glauben Jesu” (‘the faith of Jesus’). The Einheitsübersetzung (1980) has “an der Treue zu Jesus” (‘faithfulness to Jesus’). Note the distinction between *Glaube* and *Treue* in German, the former corresponding to ‘faith’ and the latter to ‘faithfulness’ in English. Both options lie within the semantic field of *pistis*.

⁵ The three options named above are also represented in French translations. Louis Segond (1910) and Nouvelle Édition Genève (1979) have “la foi de Jésus” (‘the faith of Jesus’). The French Jerusalem Bible (1973) and the Traduction Oecuménique (1988) prefer “la foi en Jésus” (‘the faith in Jesus’). The revised edition of the Français courant translation (1997) has “fidèles à Jésus” (‘faithful to Jesus’). Note again, as in English and German translation, that the semantic range of *pistis* accommodates *foi* (‘faith’) and *fidélité* (‘faithfulness’).

⁶ Among commentaries the objective genitive reading predominates with quite different emphases, either as “faith *in* Jesus” or as “faithfulness *to* Jesus.” Swete (*Apocalypse*, 186) sees πίστις Ἰησοῦ as “the faith which has Jesus for its Object,” a view that is shared by Charles (*Revelation*, I, 369). Beckwith (*The Apocalypse*, 659) specifies that the phrase speaks of the objective “faith in Jesus” and *not* of fidelity. Lenski (*Revelation*, 439), Caird (*Revelation*, 188), and Stefanovic (*Revelation*, 454) agree that the expression is an objective genitive denoting “faith in Jesus.” Mounce (*Revelation*, 277) describes the term as “continuing reliance on Jesus.” To Beale (*Revelation*, 766-67), the genitive is a genitive of source, “faith *from* Jesus,” but the meaning lies close to the objective genitive, “faith in Jesus,” and it is sufficiently ambiguous to include even the subjective genitive, “Jesus’ faith.” Barclay (*Revelation* II, 112) invests the expression with the sense of “loyalty,” and Aune (*Revelation* 1-5, 81; *Revelation* 6-16, 837-38) treats the term as an objective genitive meaning “faithfulness to Jesus.” Roloff (*Revelation*, 176) and Osborne (*Revelation*, 543-4) see behind the phrase people who “remain steadfast and faithful” or are “faithful to Jesus.” As to a subjective genitive reading, Kraft (*Offenbarung*, 192) and Lohmeyer (*Offenbarung*, 126) prefer “the faith of Jesus,” but neither offers any elaboration. Hanson (*Wrath of the Lamb*, 172), on the other hand, argues pointedly that τὴν πίστιν Ἰησοῦ means not just “faith concerning Jesus” but “the same faith that Jesus manifested in his life and death.”

The three alternatives show that πίστις may be understood either as “faith” or as “faithfulness,”⁷ and the complete expression τὴν πίστιν Ἰησοῦ may be seen as including or involving either an objective or a subjective genitive.⁸ Contextual considerations are obviously important whichever possibility is preferred, but it is nevertheless of interest to consider the options – among the ones that are allowable on lexical grounds – that have come into general usage in Bible translations. For the objective genitive there are two options, ‘faith *in* Jesus’ or ‘faithfulness *to* Jesus,’ both of which have a following among interpreters. For the subjective genitive reading there are also two possibilities, ‘the faith of Jesus’ or ‘the faithfulness of Jesus.’ While the two subjective genitive options lie closer in meaning and focus than the two alternatives offered as objective genitives, they are not identical. ‘Faith’ and ‘faithfulness’ are not interchangeable terms in English even though both lie within the range of πίστις, and the distinction is preserved even more strikingly by the words *Glaube* and *Treue* in German translations, or by the French *foi* and *fidélité*. What is more remarkable, however, is that only one of the subjective genitive options have won widespread acceptance. In fact, none of the versions consulted in the present connection translates

⁷ Bultmann (art. πίστις, *TDNT* 6:174-82) demonstrates that πίστις in classical Greek on the one hand carries the meaning of ‘reliability,’ ‘trustworthiness,’ and even as ‘proof’ and the ‘means of proof,’ and on the other hand represents the stance toward one whose trustworthiness is above question, that is, ‘confidence’ or ‘trust.’ The Old Testament conditioning of πίστις is undeniable and crucial, but Old Testament and Hellenistic usage merely expands the scope and direction of meanings that are already intrinsic to the Greek term. According to Ian G. Wallis (*The faith of Jesus Christ in early Christian Traditions* [SNTSMS 84; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995], 1-23), lexical evidence for pre-New Testament use of πίστις in the Septuagint and in Hellenistic Jewish Literature favours the notion of ‘faithfulness’ rather than ‘faith’. If, “as the OT understands it, faith is always man’s reaction to God’s primary action” (Weiser, art. πίστις *TDNT* 6:182), the premise of the term is God’s faithfulness. Bultmann (*TDNT* 6:204) shows that πίστις in the New Testament “can mean both ‘faithfulness’ and ‘trust,’” but he claims that “it is seldom used in the former sense,” that is, as ‘faithfulness.’ This view is no longer tenable. Beginning before Bultmann’s day and continuing with increasing vigour to the present time work on πίστις Χριστοῦ and related expressions in Pauline literature has greatly attenuated Bultmann’s view on the New Testament use of πίστις if not invalidated it altogether. The conceptual realignment of πίστις negates much of his assertion that the New Testament concept of faith diverges significantly from the Old Testament.

⁸ Beale (*Revelation*, 766-67), as noted, reads πίστις Ἰησοῦ as a genitive of source, “faith from Jesus,” but the meaning reflects the objective genitive, “faith in Jesus.”

ἡ πίστις Ἰησοῦ as ‘the faithfulness of Jesus’ even though this option is as appropriate as any of the others on lexical and contextual grounds. In the following grid, the lexical option that is *not* found in any major translation has therefore been bracketed.

ἡ πίστις Ἰησοῦ	Faith	Faithfulness
Objective genitive	Faith in Jesus	faithfulness to Jesus
Subjective genitive	the faith of Jesus	[the faithfulness of Jesus]

On the basis of the foregoing, three observations are in order before considering each of the available options separately and in depth. First, there should be at least *four* main options for the meaning of ἡ πίστις Ἰησοῦ in Revelation and not only three.⁹ Rendering ἡ πίστις Ἰησοῦ as ‘the faithfulness of Jesus’ is as legitimate as any of the other options. Second, whether for the objective or the subjective genitive reading of πίστις Ἰησοῦ, there will be nuances and gradations of meaning with respect to πίστις when πίστις is understood as ‘faith.’¹⁰ Third, the weight of evidence, most of which is to be considered below, prioritizes the subjective over objective genitive readings of the phrase καὶ τὴν πίστιν Ἰησοῦ regardless of the meaning of πίστις.

Accordingly, this thesis will argue that it is precisely the option that is missing in current translations that best reflects the scope of ἡ πίστις Ἰησοῦ in Revelation. For this reason the merits of translating ἡ πίστις Ἰησοῦ as ‘the faithfulness of Jesus’ will be discussed first.

⁹ πίστις occurs four times in Revelation (2:13, 19; 13:10; 14:12). Charles (*Revelation*, I, 61) reads πίστις as ‘faithfulness’ in 2:19 and 13:10, as ‘faith’ in 2:13 and 14:12. Aune (*Revelation 1-5*, 184, 202; *Revelation 6-16*, 751, 837) prefers ‘faithfulness’ in 2:19 and 14:12 and ‘faith’ in 2:13 and 13:10. Beale (*Revelation*, 246, 260, 705, 766) argues in favour of ‘faith’ in all four instances.

¹⁰ Bultmann (*TDNT* 6:203-15) discusses πίστις as (1) acceptance of the Christian message; (2) the content of faith in a narrativial sense; (3) a personal relation to Christ; (4) confidence (*fides qua creditur*); (5) and the content of faith in a doctrinal sense (*fides quae creditur*). πίστις as ‘faithfulness’ has a lesser range of options; the most important question will be faithfulness with reference to what.

The Faithfulness of Jesus

Points that must be considered as relevant and as largely supporting 'the faithfulness of Jesus' as the best rendering of ἡ πίστις Ἰησοῦ are (1) the conditioning of the story line; (2) the explicative quality of the doublet τὰς ἐντολάς τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὴν πίστιν Ἰησοῦ; (3) the Christology of Revelation; (4) the relationship between ἡ πίστις Ἰησοῦ and ἡ μαρτυρία Ἰησοῦ and similar terms in Revelation; and (5) the nuances of the verbal qualifier of τὴν πίστιν Ἰησοῦ.

The Conditioning of the Story Line

Revelation's sole reference to ἡ πίστις Ἰησοῦ (14:12) belongs in the context of the eschatological climax of the cosmic conflict, precisely when the deceptive programme of "the ancient serpent" attains unprecedented sophistication and intensity (13:1-18) and, on a parallel track, the divine countermeasures are running out of options (14:6-11). The story line leading to this critical juncture has been assessed in Part Two and must now be applied to the interpretation of the eschatological drama. At this late point in the story two 'distant' narrative constituents remain important: the memory of "the Shining One" as the original identity of the antagonist (Isa 14:12; Rev 12:7) and the deceptive and slanderous character of the satanic programme (Gen 3:1; Rev 13:5-6).

Nevertheless, granting the crucial role of these two factors, the element in the narrative that exerts the most decisive influence on ἡ πίστις Ἰησοῦ relates to the means that are employed in order to set things right. As noted in the review of the story line, perplexity with respect to means captures the issue and the subject matter that confronts the heavenly council (4:1-2; 5:1-3),¹¹ probing into the innermost character of the divine

¹¹ Yarbrow Collins (*Apocalypse*, 39, 60), perceiving the context the cosmic conflict that frames Revelation's narrative, puts more emphasis on the rebellion than on the means used to overcome it.

government. In this context the presentation of the Lamb, “as if it had been slaughtered” (5:6), assumes a function that is both revelatory and persuasive. The image of the slaughtered Lamb, I contend, recognizing its revelatory and persuasive impact, embodies and defines the meaning of ‘the faithfulness of Jesus’ in Revelation.

When ‘the faithfulness of Jesus’ is held up as the lodestar for those who face the climax of the cosmic conflict (14:12), it is because ‘faithfulness’ encapsulates the contested issue in the conflict from the very beginning. The faithfulness that is thus affirmed receives its proper scope and emphasis only when it is held in juxtaposition with the possibility, indeed, the appearance, of its absence. To the heavenly council (5:1-3) and the victims of injustice (6:10), hard-knuckled evidence seem to indicate *unfaithfulness* on the part of the divine government. The quest for one who is worthy to open the scroll (5:2) and the lament of the martyrs (6:10) relate directly to God’s method in the cosmic conflict and reflect on the character of God. Even when the reader has to make do with the narrow connotation of the English word, ‘faithfulness’ stands as the guiding light at the end of the story. As suggested earlier, no one steps forward in attempt to break the seals of the scroll because absolutely no one else in the entire universe would have solved the cosmic conflict by the means that comes to view in the person of the slaughtered Lamb (5:5-6).

Hearing the echo of the question asked in the presence of the heavenly council (5:2) and the lesser echo of the martyrs’ cry (6:10) in the context of the eschatological drama, the final exhortation (14:12) is a ringing affirmation of God’s faithfulness if πίστις is read as ‘faithfulness’ and ἡ πίστις Ἰησοῦ as a subjective genitive denoting ‘the faithfulness of Jesus.’ This term needs the input of the larger story line in order to pre-empt the predilection to see Jesus’ faithfulness only against the backdrop of Jewish opponents or the hostile intent of the Roman Empire. In the context of the cosmic

conflict, God's way in history has come precariously close to confirming the delinquency charged to the divine government to the point that it threatens the confidence of believers (6:10) and leaves even the heavenly intelligences perplexed (5:3). The means that expose the fallacy of the diabolic charge do not come as a matter of course. On the contrary, 'the faithfulness of Jesus' represents a profound revision in qualitative terms because it does not correspond to faithfulness measured by ordinary expectations but by "the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1:1).¹²

The possibility that ἡ πίστις Ἰησοῦ belongs to a statement that is essentially paranetic¹³ means that paranesis on the human level is grounded in the divine example. What is held up as the model for the believer and the stance by which believers must prevail are determined by God's character as it has come to light in the course of the cosmic conflict. To have 'the faithfulness of Jesus' as the point of reference in the final confrontation in the cosmic conflict is to accede to the convictions and to assume the posture by which the influence of the opponent has already been curtailed (12:7-12).

Still more is at stake, however, in appropriating ἡ πίστις Ἰησοῦ. Only when it is appreciated that 'the faithfulness of Jesus' represents a quality in God that has been held in doubt and even fiercely denied, are the full ramifications of the cosmic conflict brought to bear on this expression. This aspect of ἡ πίστις Ἰησοῦ is understood better when the entire doublet of which this expression is a part is considered.

The Explicative Quality of τὴν πίστιν Ἰησοῦ

The term under consideration, ἡ πίστις Ἰησοῦ, belongs to a doublet, τὰς ἐντολάς τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὴν πίστιν Ἰησοῦ (14:12), and it cannot be explained apart from the term to

¹² The temptation to reduce this expression to a statement of literary genre greatly weakens its contribution to the revisionary power of Revelation.

¹³ Aune, "Genre," 90; idem., *Revelation 6-16*, 798.

which it is intimately connected. But this doublet is in turn so closely related to similar expressions in Revelation that they should be considered together.¹⁴

τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ (1:2)

διὰ τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ (1:9)

διὰ τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ διὰ τὴν μαρτυρίαν ἣν εἶχον (6:9)

τηρούντων τὰς ἐντολὰς τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ ἐχόντων τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ (12:17)

οἱ τηροῦντες τὰς ἐντολὰς τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὴν πίστιν Ἰησοῦ (14:12)

διὰ τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ καὶ διὰ τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ (20:4)

There can be no doubt that these widely diffused doublets are thematically significant and that they cover essentially the same territory even when the contextual parameters vary slightly.¹⁵ On the whole their repeated use suggests overlap to the point that they are closely intertwined and virtually interchangeable. Recognizing the close and nearly synonymous flavour, ὁ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ, with the straightforward translation “the word of God” (1:2, 9; 6:9; 20:4), corresponds to αἱ ἐντολαὶ τοῦ θεοῦ, “the commandments of God” (12:17; 14:12). As for the other half of the doublet, ἡ μαρτυρία Ἰησοῦ, translated “the testimony of Jesus” or “the witness of Jesus” (1:2, 9; 12:17; 20:4), lies close to ἡ πίστις Ἰησοῦ, for which ‘the faithfulness of Jesus’ (14:12) is here seen as the best alternative. The variation in these phrases is no greater than that a near identical connotation ought to be the first option for the interpreter.

Aune notes that the conjunction καὶ that joins “the word of God” and “the witness of Jesus” may be exegetical, meaning that “the word of God” is explained

¹⁴ Cf. H. Strathmann, art. μάρτυς, *TDNT* 4:500; F. Mazzaferri, “*Martyria Iēsou* Revisited,” *BT* 39 (1988), 120.

¹⁵ Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 19. In addition, two additional doublets and one ‘contracted’ doublet in the messages to the seven churches should be considered, namely, to the church in Pergamum, καὶ κρατεῖς τὸ ὄνομά μου καὶ οὐκ ἠρνήσω τὴν πίστιν μου (2:13); and to the church in Philadelphia, καὶ ἐτήρησάς μου τὸν λόγον καὶ οὐκ ἠρνήσω τὸ ὄνομά μου (3:8); and ὅτι ἐτήρησας τὸν λόγον τῆς ὑπομονῆς μου (3:10).

and defined by “the witness of Jesus Christ.”¹⁶ Likewise, Beale emphasizes that καὶ τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ is parallel with τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ and “clarifies its precise content.”¹⁷ In all these doublets the use of καί conforms well to the explicative and even emphatic sense, best translated as ‘that is,’ ‘namely,’ ‘even,’ or ‘in fact,’¹⁸ and this relationship is made even more plausible by the Semitic texture of the Greek of Revelation.

But “the commandments of God,” constituting the core of the doublet, must clearly be defined more precisely, beginning with the relationship between αἱ ἐντολαὶ τοῦ θεοῦ and related terms in the Book of Revelation itself. This expression should also be compared to similar terminology in the rest of the New Testament, particularly in the Johannine writings. Moreover, it is necessary to look into the influence of Old Testament ideation and to assess the extent to which this expression reflects the issue in the cosmic conflict.

1. αἱ ἐντολαὶ τοῦ θεοῦ in the Context of Revelation

As noted in the six doublets above (1:2, 9; 6:9; 12:17; 14:12; 20:4), there appears to be a high degree of fluidity and overlap between αἱ ἐντολαὶ τοῦ θεοῦ, “the commandments of God,” and ὁ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ, “the word of God.” Beale suggests that “the commandments of God” should be seen as “a wholistic reference to the objective

¹⁶ Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 19. Strathmann (*TDNT* 4:500) notes that “the Word of God and the witness of Jesus Christ are inseparably interwoven.” Mazzaferri (“*Martyria Iēsou*,” 120) also sees μαρτυρία Ἰησοῦ as an appositional phrase to τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ. While Aune (*Revelation 1-5*, 81) reads ἡ μαρτυρία Ἰησοῦ as a subjective genitive in 1:2, 9; 11:7; 12:11; cf. 6:9) and as an objective genitive in 12:17; 14:12; 17:6; 19:10; and 20:4, he regards ἡ πίστις Ἰησοῦ as an objective genitive denoting “faithfulness to Jesus” (*Revelation 6-16*, 838).

¹⁷ Beale, *Revelation*, 184.

¹⁸ Cf. BDAG, art. καί, 495; H.E. Dana and Julius R. Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (Ontario: The Macmillan Company, 1969), 250-51; Turner, *Syntax*, 335.

revelation of the old and new covenants to which the faithful remain loyal.”¹⁹ If this proposal captures the scope and meaning of “the commandments of God” alone, a broad and inclusive connotation is confirmed and enhanced by hearing “the word of God” as a term that covers the same conceptual territory. God’s programme, message, and purpose are in Revelation fielded under the inclusive term “the word of God” or by the term “the commandments of God,” also to be taken in a broad sense and used almost interchangeably. Nevertheless, “the commandments of God” cannot escape the ethical ring and the impression that it embodies the constitutional basis of the divine government. Therefore, while “the word of God” safeguards the inclusive and comprehensive reach of these terms, “the commandments of God,” understood as a singular, invests the terms with a particular focus.

2. *Similar Terms in the New Testament*

There is common ground between αἱ ἐντολαὶ τοῦ θεοῦ in Revelation and the rest of the New Testament. Charles writes on this point that “the especially Johannine character of the diction is to be observed.”²⁰ A case in point is found in the Gospel of John, where Jesus says, Ἐὰν ἀγαπᾷτέ με, τὰς ἐντολάς τὰς ἐμὰς τηρήσετε (John 14:15). Equally significant in the same discourse is the statement, Ἐὰν τις ἀγαπᾷ με τὸν λόγον μου τηρήσει (John 14:23). In these examples are found all the three elements that are characteristic in Revelation, αἱ ἐντολαί, ὁ λόγος, and the accompanying verb τηρεῖν. To be sure, in the texts in John, Jesus speaks of “my commandments” and “my words,” but this does not weaken the parallel because Jesus declares that “the word that you hear is not mine, but is from the Father who sent me” (John 14:24). Indeed, when Jesus tells

¹⁹ Beale, *Revelation*, 766.

²⁰ Charles, *Revelation* I, 369.

his disciples to keep “my commandments,” there is no doubt that the commandments he has in mind are “my Father’s commandments” (John 15:10), and thus “the commandments of God” no less than in Revelation.

Despite well known differences between the Gospel of John and Revelation, Luke Timothy Johnson points to areas of convergence that are so characteristic as to ensure, at the very least, acquaintance with the Johannine writings.²¹ The intermingling in the Johannine writings of “my word,” “my commandments,” and the emphasis on keeping his words and commandments represent a striking area of concern common to the Johannine writings and Revelation, expressed in similar-sounding terminology.²² It follows that the Johannine usage of these terms should not be ignored in the interpretation of αἱ ἐντολαὶ τοῦ θεοῦ in Revelation. To the extent that this term in Revelation is flavoured by Johannine usage, the meaning of “the commandments of God” is tilted toward the emphasis given by the teachings and example of the earthly Jesus according to the Johannine witness.²³

3. Old Testament Ideation

The indistinct boundary between αἱ ἐντολαὶ τοῦ θεοῦ and ὁ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ in Revelation does not represent a novelty with respect to terminology that describes the

²¹ Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Writings of the New Testament* (Rev. ed.; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 579-81.

²² For further evidence of the pervasive use and mingling of these elements in the Gospel of John and 1 John, see John 5:24, 38; 6:60; 8:31, 37, 43, 51, 52, 55; 10:18, 12:49-50; 13:34; 14:15, 21, 23, 24; 15:10, 12, 20; 17:6, 14, 17; 1 John 2:3, 4, 5; 3:22, 24; 5:3, 18. Charles (*Revelation* 1, 369) points out that ἐντολή is a favourite Johannine word, occurring 27 times in the Gospel of John and the Johannine Epistles and 37 times in the rest of the New Testament.

²³ Two characteristics are especially noteworthy. First, there is a narrative quality to what is meant by “my word” in the Gospel of John; it includes Jesus’ teaching as well as the perception of his entire life; cf. John 2:22; 4:41, 50; 5:24, 38; 6:60; 8:31, 37, 43; 17:14, 17. Second, there is a narrative quality to “the commandments,” too, and contrary to conventional usage, the emphasis in the commandments in John is redemptive. Speaking of laying down his life and taking it again, Jesus says that “I have received this command (ἐντολή) from my Father” (John 10:18). As if to define the essence of the commandment, Jesus says that “his commandment (ἐντολή) is eternal life” (John 12:50).

entire Old Testament revelation.²⁴ Stephen B. Chapman adduces ample scriptural evidence that the categories of ‘law’ and ‘words,’ legal material and prophecy, increasingly come to be seen as one in the Old Testament.²⁵ In the process of the softening up of conceptual boundaries he observes “a ‘prophetization’ of the law at the same time as a ‘nomisticization’ of prophecy.”²⁶ תורה, perceived as law or commandments, and דבר, understood as ‘word,’ reflect a unity within which these terms are equally at home in the semantic contexts of law, prophecy, and wisdom.²⁷ The unifying element is not literary fixity but perceived content; “like תורה, in the late period דבר comes to mean the entirety of divine revelation, referring to pentateuchal as well as non-pentateuchal scripture.”²⁸ These terms encompass “everything that conformed to the character of their combined insight into the nature and purpose of God.”²⁹

The quest for conceptual precision and speciation therefore runs contrary to the sense of unity in what is revealed, whether as commandments, narrative, or prophecy. The boundaries are further erased by the fact that ‘law’ and ‘commandment’ in the Old Testament often have a synonymous valence. God tells Moses to ascend the mountain in order to receive “the tablets of stone, with the law (התורה) and the commandment (המצוה),” translated by the Septuagint as τὰ λίθινα τὸν νόμον καὶ τὰς ἐντολάς (Ex

²⁴ Cf. Beale, *Revelation*, 766.

²⁵ Stephen B. Chapman, “‘The law and the words’ as a canonical formula within the Old Testament,” in *Interpretation of scripture in early Judaism and Christianity* (eds. James H. Charlesworth and Lester L. Grabbe; JSPSS 33; Sheffield : Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 26-74.

²⁶ Chapman, “The law and the words,” 55.

²⁷ Chapman, “The law and the words,” 52.

²⁸ Chapman, “The law and the words,” 60.

²⁹ Chapman, “The law and the words,” 60.

24:12). This deals a blow to the hope of drawing a clear line of demarcation between νόμος and ἐντολή, and the conceptual overlap of these terms apply with special force from the vantage point of Revelation since Revelation seems more indebted to the Hebrew text than to the Septuagint.³⁰

Nevertheless, just as the Sinai theophany and the giving of the Ten Commandments occupy pride of place in the Old Testament, “the commandments of God” are hardly emptied of this incomparable connotation in Revelation. Indeed, there is compelling evidence to the contrary, and two elements stand out in particular bold print. First, in each of the cycles of seven there is an accompanying display of light and sound on the order of the Sinai encounter (Ex 19:16-18; Rev 4:5; 8:5; 11:19; 16:18). While this network of allusions to a particular Old Testament incident repeatedly conjures up images of this incident as such, it also highlights its importance.

Second, sanctuary or tabernacle imagery is pervasive throughout Revelation.³¹ At the climax of the trumpet sequence allusions to the Sinai theophany and the Ten Commandments come together in one single reference (11:19), harnessing these for the complete disclosure of what is billed as “the mystery of God” (10:7). John is told that “in the days when the seventh angel is to blow his trumpet, the mystery of God will be fulfilled, as he announced to his servants the prophets” (10:7).³² Then, after the long *Zwischenstück* between the sixth and the seventh trumpet, “the seventh angel blew his trumpet” (11:15). At that point “God’s temple in heaven was opened, and the ark of his

³⁰ This fact makes a moot point of the discussion whether νόμος in the LXX adequately translates ‘Torah’ in Hebrew; cf. Peter Richardson and Stephen Westerholm, *Law in Religious Communities in the Roman Period: the Debate over Torah and Nomos in Post-biblical Judaism and Early Christianity* (SCJ 4; Waterloo, Ont : Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1991), 45-56.

³¹ References to the temple alone, aside from the frequent mention of temple furnishings and rituals, are found in Rev 3:12; 7:15; 11:1, 2, 19 (x2); 14:15, 17; 15:5, 6, 8 (x2); 16:1, 17; 21:22 (x2); cf. Paulien, “Hebrew Cultus, Sanctuary, and Temple,” 245-64.

³² This allusion to Amos (3:7) signifies both God’s intent to reveal his purpose and the fact that the disclosure in view embraces all that is anticipated in the prior revelation.

covenant was seen within his temple; and there were flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake, and heavy hail” (11:19). Revelation and vindication meet in this imagery, evoking the Sinai theophany and the Ten Commandments enshrined in the Ark of the Covenant as its subtext, and strongly suggesting that what is transmitted in this imagery is nothing short of the character of the divine government and its constitutional foundation.³³

4. *Metaphor for the Cosmic Conflict*

The foregoing suggests that αἱ ἐντολαὶ τοῦ θεοῦ functions as a metaphor for the issue that lies at the heart of the cosmic conflict. The fallen opponent is going off to make war *on the rest of the woman’s offspring*,³⁴ defined as those keeping τὰς ἐντολάς τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ ἐχόντων τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ (12:17). At face value the main object of hostility in this scenario is the believer. Hostility toward the believer, however, is not the whole story about the war that began in heaven and that is here drawing to a close (12:7, 17).³⁵ Underlying the pursuit of those who hold on to “the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus,” is an attack on the divine government itself.

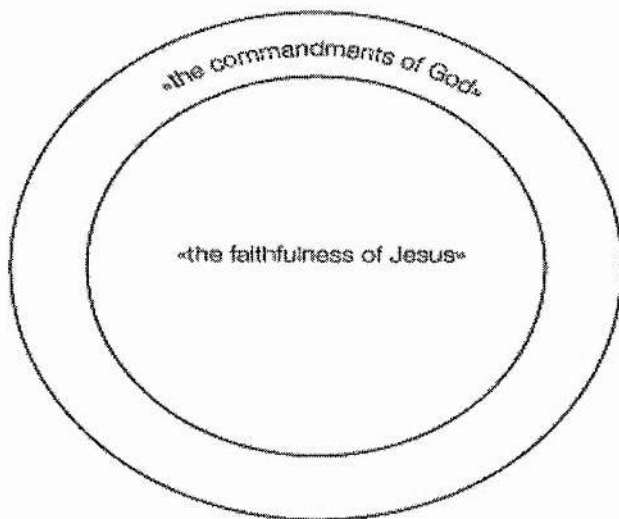
Returning to the explicative quality of τὴν πίστιν Ἰησοῦ with respect to τὰς ἐντολάς τοῦ θεοῦ (14:12), a single issue appears to be in view. To avoid the impression of two contested areas, “the word of God” and “the testimony of Jesus” (1:2), or “the commandments of God” and “the faithfulness of Jesus” (14:12), the second half of the

³³ Adele Berlin (“Numinous nomos: on the relationship between narrative and law,” in *Wise and discerning minds* [eds. Saul M. Olyan and Robert C. Culley; Providence, R.I.: Brown Judaic Studies, 2000], 25-31) draws a picture of the relationship between narrative and law in the Old Testament that differs drastically from the stereotype, the latter typically extolling narrative and disparaging law. “The commands, that is, the laws, partake of the numinousness of God’s presence. It is not only numinous *nomos*, but also luminous *nomos*,” she writes in her revisionary account. (p. 29).

³⁴ The allusion to Gen 3:15 should be noted.

³⁵ The language describing the dragon’s activity employs consistent terminology that suggests continuity, from ἐγένετο πόλεμος ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ at the beginning (12:7), to καὶ ἀπῆλθεν ποιῆσαι πόλεμον in the end (12:17).

expression is dispensable. The conflict has one concern and is adequately described as a contest over “the word of God” or “the commandments of God” alone. In reality, of course, the explicated meaning of “the word of God” depends entirely on “the testimony of Jesus,” and “the commandments of God” cannot be severed from ‘the faithfulness of Jesus.’³⁶ In order to show that the relationship between these terms is seamless, they should not be placed side by side but should rather be seen as one within the other.



Indeed, in what appears as the climactic summation of the cosmic conflict, the doublet has disappeared, its two prior constituents subsumed under the single headline, “the word of God” (ὁ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ; 19:13).³⁷ As the next point will attempt to show,

³⁶ What is thus affirmed as a general theme in Revelation (1:2, 9; 6:9) and as the specific area of conflict during the eschatological climax (12:17; 14:12) also helps clarify the point that is under attack by “the ancient serpent” and his end-time collaborators (12:17).

³⁷ Mazzaferri, “*Martyria Iēsou*,” 119. Rev 19:11-16 is a complex passage. Its relevance in the present context relates mainly to the prominence of “the word of God” as the unifying designation of the identity and character of the rider on the white horse. Nevertheless, the passage also features other characteristic elements in Revelation: the open heaven (19:11; cf. 4:1; 11:19; 15:5); the faithful and true character of the rider (19:11); the meticulous attention to the means by which he goes about bringing the conflict to an end (19:11); and the theme of cosmic conflict itself (19:11; cf. 12:7, 17).

the Christology of Revelation provides additional support for an explicative relationship between “the commandments of God” and ‘the faithfulness of Jesus.’

The Christology of Revelation

The Christology of Revelation is important for the understanding of ἡ πίστις Ἰησοῦ because the intimate relationship between God and Jesus in Revelation makes God the ultimate subject of the action, attributing the faithfulness that is in view to God. The legitimacy of this conclusion takes on additional force when considering Isaiah as one of the sources of Revelation’s Christology and a significant tributary to its understanding of πίστις.

Revelation’s use of Isaiah represents the most striking example of what Bauckham calls its “inclusion of Jesus in the unique divine identity.”³⁸ John alludes to Isaianic statements that strongly emphasize monotheism, appropriating these statements for its description of Jesus. Thus, in Isaiah, God says,

I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god (Isa 44.6).

I am He; I am the first, and I am the last (Isa 48:12).

In Revelation, echoes of these claims are applied to Jesus as a matter of course.

I am the first and the last, and the living one (1:17-18).

These are the words of the first and the last... (2:8).

I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end (22:13).

Not only is Revelation here appropriating Old Testament declarations for its description of Jesus but it is doing so while also applying them freely to God (1:8;

³⁸ Bauckham, *God Crucified*, 54.

21:6).³⁹ It is partly against the background of the titles shared by God and Jesus that Jesus' work in Revelation is representative of divine activity, warranting the claim that, on the one hand, "what Christ does, God does,"⁴⁰ and, *vice versa*, what God does is expressed and reflected in the faithful life and death of Jesus.

While these exclusive designations are used interchangeably of God and Jesus, signifying that Jesus occupies God's level ontologically, they are also 'characterological' declarations. If the revelation of Jesus as a slaughtered Lamb in Revelation comes as a surprise, a similar shock at the disclosure of God's means has already been heralded in Isaiah (Isa 52:14-15; 53:1-2). Indeed, just as Revelation invokes Isaiah in order to include Jesus in the identity of the one God, it pointedly selects passages in Isaiah that makes *faithfulness* the hallmark of the divine character. The attribute of faithfulness that is ascribed to Jesus in Revelation derives from the same quality found in God according to Isaiah. In the message to the church at Laodicea, it says,

Τάδε λέγει ὁ Ἀμήν, ὁ μάρτυς ὁ πιστὸς καὶ ἀληθινός, ἡ ἀρχὴ τῆς κτίσεως τοῦ θεοῦ (3:14).

This characterization, calling Jesus "the faithful and true witness" (3:14; cf. 19:11), pushes 'faithfulness' prominently into the foreground as an essential trait of Jesus' character, and this trait is etched still more deeply into the message of Revelation when the Old Testament roots of the word often left untranslated, Jesus as ὁ Ἀμήν, is explored.

In Isaiah this designation is used to describe how God is to be seen by the believer.

³⁹ Cf. Bauckham, *God Crucified*, 53-54.

⁴⁰ Bauckham, *Revelation*, 63.

Then whoever invokes a blessing in the land shall bless by the God of faithfulness, and whoever takes an oath in the land shall swear by the God of faithfulness; because the former troubles are forgotten and are hidden from my sight.

Isa 65:16

In the Hebrew text "the God of faithfulness" appears almost like a pithy slogan, *Elohe 'âmen*, repeated twice and precisely because it fundamentally expresses the quality in God that the writer wishes to establish beyond doubt.⁴¹

אֲשֶׁר הַמְתַּכְרֵךְ בָּאָרֶץ יִתְכַּרֵּךְ בֵּאלֹהֵי אָמֵן
וְהַנִּשְׁבַּע בָּאָרֶץ יִשְׁבַּע בֵּאלֹהֵי אָמֵן

Jesus is in Revelation (3:14) invested with the quality ascribed to God in Isaiah, and, in fact, as the incontrovertible witness that faithfulness *is* a quality in God. Rissi writes observantly that "the divine name of Isa. 65.16 is here applied to Christ. The formula *ὁ μάρτυς ὁ πιστὸς καὶ ἀληθινός* is nothing but a translation and explanation of the Hebrew word 'Amen'."⁴²

Moreover, and despite James Barr's insistent warning against allowing etymological inferences to determine the current meaning of a word,⁴³ it is a sin of omission to ignore that the Old Testament antecedents for the faithfulness that is affirmed in Revelation cast a wider semantic net than the word 'faithfulness' itself is able to convey. This is partly demonstrated by the range of wordings of *Elohe 'âmen* in

⁴¹ Thus Franz Delitzsch (*The Prophecies of Isaiah* [2 vols., trans. James Martin; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950], II, 487), "For the same reason God is called *Elohe 'âmen*, 'the God of Amen,' i.e. the God who turns what He promises into Yea and Amen (2 Cor. i. 20). The epithet derived from the confirmatory Amen, which is thus applied to Jehovah, is similar to the expression in Rev. iii. 14, where Jesus is called 'the Amen, the faithful and true witness.'"

⁴² Rissi, *Future of the World*, 21.

⁴³ Barr, *Semantics of Biblical Language*, 21-45, 161-205; idem., "Etymology and the Old Testament," in *Language and Meaning: Studies in Hebrew Language and Biblical Exegesis* (eds. J. Barr et al.; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1974), 1-28.

reputable Bible translations,⁴⁴ and the broader meaning carries over into Revelation because of the author's likely use of the Hebrew text of the Old Testament and the Semitic character of its Greek. *Elohe 'âmen* should not be considered apart from the verbal form *'âman* (אָמַן), or the closely related nouns *'emeth* (אֱמֶת) and *'emunah* (אֱמוּנָה). These concepts, while distinct, are nevertheless closely related, and they embody precisely the qualities that the explicative phrase in Revelation gives to the meaning of ὁ Ἀμήν, representing Jesus as ὁ μάρτυς ὁ πιστὸς καὶ ἀληθινός, "the faithful and true witness."⁴⁵ It is also noteworthy that Aquila translates *'âmen* as *pepistōménōs* and not by *alēthinón*, as in the Septuagint, indicating that Aquila's preference is a more nuanced rendition of the Hebrew text.⁴⁶ Alfred Jepsen concludes that

[w]hen a Hebrew heard the various words derived from the root *'mn*, the basic idea that came to his mind was apparently "constancy." When they were used of things, they meant "continual"; and when they were connected with persons, "reliability." ... From "stability" through "reliability," *'emeth* acquires the meaning of "truth," while *'emunah* conveys more the idea of "conduct that grows out of reliability," i.e., "faithfulness."⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Many translations of *Elohe 'âmen* have "the God of truth" (KJV, ASV, RSV, NASB, NIV, NJB, and NKJV). The NEB has "the God of Amen" while GNB has "the Faithful God." French translations have "le Dieu de vérité" (LSG, NEG), "le Dieu de l'amen" (TOB), and the more descriptive "le nom du Dieu sur qui l'on peut compter" (BFC). In German, the original Lutherbibel (1545) preferred "in dem rechten Gott," revised to "in dem wahrhaftigen Gott" (1912), and to "im Namen des wahrhaftigen Gottes" (1984). Other German translations have "von Gott, dem Getreuen" (EIN) and "bei dem Gott der Treue" (ELB).

⁴⁵ Alfred Jepsen (art. אָמַן *'âman*, TDOT 1:313) notes that "*'emeth* was used of things that had to be proved in order to be reliable," suggesting that 'reliability' is the best and most comprehensive term for *'emeth* in English. *'emunah*, on the other hand, is to be seen as "not so much an abstract quality, 'reliability,' but a way of acting which grows out of inner stability, 'conscientiousness' (p. 317). Thus, "while *'emeth* describes the character of a person on whose words and deeds one can rely, *'emunah* denotes the conduct of a person corresponding to his own inner being. *'emeth* is used of God's words and deeds on which man can rely; *'emunah* is used of God's conduct, which corresponds to the nature of his deity" (p. 320).

⁴⁶ Jepsen, TDOT 1:322; cf. Joseph Reider, *An Index to Aquila* (compl. and rev. by Nigel Turner; VT Sup 12; Leiden, E. J. Brill, 1966), 264.

⁴⁷ Jepsen, TDOT 1:322-23.

As suggested already, these etymological and semantic soundings in the Old Testament correspond strikingly to the meaning of ὁ Ἀμήν in Revelation.⁴⁸ John serves 'faithfulness' in a double portion in his identification of Jesus (3:14), as a noun (ὁ Ἀμήν) and as an adjective (πιστός) explicating the noun. Neither the meaning nor the rich semantic field of the Old Testament term has been diluted or contracted by its use in Revelation. On the contrary, the contextual parameters in Revelation endow the notion of faithfulness with still greater force because the quality that is described here is projected onto the larger canvas of the cosmic conflict, and the faithfulness of God is affirmed not only because it is eternally true but also because it is maliciously attacked (12:17; 14:12).

From the foregoing it appears incontrovertible that πίστις in ἡ πίστις Ἰησοῦ is weighted toward 'faithfulness.' While 'faithfulness' is hardly sufficiently comprehensive for the meaning of πίστις, it is representative and adequate. What is affirmed by the native term encompasses reliability, trustworthiness, constancy, and even conscientiousness. In the light of the cosmic conflict and the attempt to subvert the divine government on the part of "the ancient serpent" it also means that the person

⁴⁸ Walther Eichrodt (*Theology of the Old Testament*, I, 38), in his covenant-based theology of the Old Testament, makes the absence of capriciousness a basic and characteristic quality of the divine-human relationship. "Because of this the fear that constantly haunts the pagan world, the fear of arbitrariness and caprice in the Godhead, is excluded. With this men know exactly where they stand; an atmosphere of trust and security is created, in which they find both the strength for a willing surrender to the will of God and joyful courage to grapple with the problems of life." Th. C. Vriezen (*An outline of Old Testament theology* [2d ed.; Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1970], 309), commenting on Isa 65:16, sees God's character revealed "in the idea of truth, or rather trustworthiness, so that He may even be called the God of the Amen. (Isa. lxv.16). In Hebrew the word for truth is connected with a stem meaning 'to steady', 'to hold out'. The Hebrew word for faith is also connected with this: *he'emin*, i.e. to regard God as steadfast, trustworthy. God is the God of true faithfulness (Pss. xxx.10; lvii.11); His *chesed we'emeth*, His true or faithful love is assumed again and again in the historical narratives, in the Psalms, and by the prophets. It is God who offers His *'emunah*, His faithfulness, to Israel (Hos. ii.22; English versions ii.20). In His faithfulness or truth Yahweh is the reliable God; truth is a word used in the relationship between man and man, and between God and man; it lacks, therefore, the intellectual and uncharitable tang which it may have in the western languages."

that is thus characterized is not capricious and arbitrary in his ways.⁴⁹ Indeed, although Old Testament antecedents lay the groundwork for Revelation's notion of faithfulness, it is the self-emptying disposition of Jesus, ὁ μάρτυς, ὁ πιστός (1:5a; cf. 3:14), that sets the parameters for the faithfulness that is revealed and for the love that is said to be its wellspring (1:5b).

From the high Christology of Revelation, applying to Jesus titles and attributes that are used of God, it follows that 'the faithfulness of Jesus' in every sense establishes the faithfulness of God. When "the testimony of Jesus" (1:2, 9; 20:4) and 'the faithfulness of Jesus' (14:12) are understood to be explicative in relation to "the word of God" (1:2, 9; 20:4) and "the commandments of God" (14:12), it gives these terms the status as markers of the aim of the subversive activity of the opponent in the cosmic conflict. Recalling Bauckham's assertion that the image of the slaughtered Lamb is revelatory of God's character and of "the way God rules the world,"⁵⁰ the organic and intimate relationship between "the commandments of God" and "the faithfulness of Jesus" epitomizes the vindication of God's ways and ensures the resolution to the conflict. Lest this connection be lost, 'the faithfulness of Jesus' is not to be seen merely as faithfulness to a flawed standard but faithfulness that shows the standard itself – and the Person whose character it reflects – to be free from blame.

The Relationship between ἡ πίστις Ἰησοῦ and ἡ μαρτυρία Ἰησοῦ and Similar Terms in Revelation

⁴⁹ The careful and repeated echoing of the twin notion of *'emunah* and *'emeth* applies to the way the cosmic conflict is to be won in Revelation, "Then I saw heaven opened, and there was a white horse! Its rider is called Faithful and True (πιστός καὶ ἀληθινός), and in righteousness he judges and makes war" (19:11, cf. 3:14).

⁵⁰ Bauckham, *Revelation*, 64.

There is no disagreement among interpreters that the first genitival construction in the doublet τὰς ἐντολὰς τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὴν πίστιν Ἰησοῦ (14:12) is an unambiguous subjective genitive.⁵¹ The same view applies to the other like-sounding doublets in Revelation, “the word of God” (1:2, 9; 6:9; 20:4) and “the commandments of God” (12:17; 14:12). The explicative relationship between the two elements in these doublets and the intimate bond between God and Jesus suggest that the second part of the doublet, whether τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ (1:2, 9; 12:17; 20:4) or τὴν πίστιν Ἰησοῦ (14:12), also should be seen as subjective genitives.⁵² Quite apart from the considerations noted above, ἡ μαρτυρία Ἰησοῦ is generally recognized as a subjective genitive in a number of these constructions.⁵³ Contextual variations are not significant enough to overcome the likelihood that the doublets are intended to convey the same message and connotation in most of the instances of its use.

In the vision of the slain martyrs, their fate has come about διὰ τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ διὰ τὴν μαρτυρίαν ἣν εἶχον (6:9). Charles’ comment anticipates what the present interpretation sees as the best interpretation of τῶν τηρούντων τὰς ἐντολὰς τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ ἐχόντων τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ (12:17) and οἱ τηροῦντες τὰς ἐντολὰς τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὴν πίστιν Ἰησοῦ (14:12).

⁵¹ E.g. Mazzaferri, “*Martyria Iēsou*,” 120.

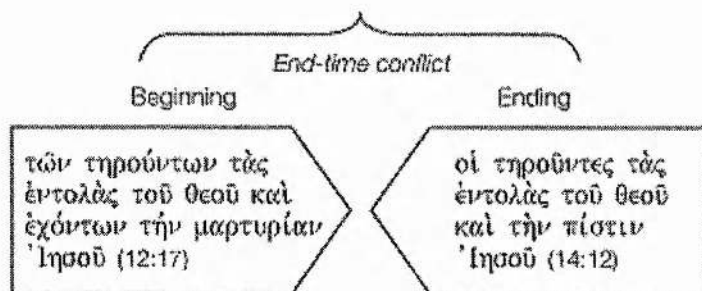
⁵² P. Vassiliades (“*Martyria Iēsou* in Revelation,” *BT* 36 [1985], 129-134) argues that *martyria* terminology in Revelation has acquired the connotation of martyrdom and that μαρτυρία Ἰησοῦ therefore should be seen as an objective genitive denoting “witness (unto death) to Jesus.” But this argument fails to convince in the light of (1) the native connotation of ‘witness’ of μαρτυρία; (2) the Old Testament antecedents of Revelation’s μαρτυρία terminology; (3) the intimate connection between *martyrein* and *prophēteuein* in Revelation (1:3; 22:7, 10, 18, 19); cf. Strathmann *TDNT* 4:495-508. Mazzaferri (“*Martyria Iēsou*,” 119) therefore seems justified in his conclusion that *martyria* in Revelation “is virtually the personal testimony of Jesus.”

⁵³ Charles (*Revelation*, I, 7) reads μαρτυρία Ἰησοῦ as a subjective genitive in 1:2 and has Jesus as the implied subject of τὴν μαρτυρίαν ἣν εἶχον in 6:9. Aune (*Revelation 1-5*, 19) sees the subjective genitive in 1:2, 9; 6:9, and 20:4. Abir (*Cosmic Conflict*, 209) argues that “it seems clear that ἡ μαρτυρία Ἰησοῦ consistently demands the subjective genitive. It refers primarily to Christ’s passion and death which is the historic testimony of the Lamb of God. He is the faithful μάρτυς because he has maintained his testimony even through the agony and suffering of the cross.”

The martyrs were put to death because of the word given by God and the witness borne by Jesus. The testimony no less than the word is an objective possession of the faithful. Many scholars have taken the witness to be that which the martyrs had borne to Christ; but the expression *εἶχον* is against such a view, and implies a testimony that has been given them by Christ and which they have *preserved*.⁵⁴

Reading “the testimony which they had” (*εἶχον*) with the sense of preserving a sacred trust (6:9) calls for a similar interpretation of the closely related statement in 12:17, that is, “those who keep the commandments of God and preserve [have] the testimony of Jesus.” Adopting Charles’ logic, here, too, Jesus should be seen as the subject of the witness that is described.

The connection that exists between the two phrases that frames the eschatological climax in Revelation favours the interpretation that takes their meaning to be virtually identical.⁵⁵



When, according to this paradigm, Jesus is the subject in “the testimony of Jesus” (12:17), he should also be seen as the subject of *τὴν πίστιν Ἰησοῦ* (14:12). On the merits presented that the preferred reading of *πίστις* is ‘faithfulness,’ the subjective genitive reading must then be “the faithfulness of Jesus.”

⁵⁴ Charles, *Revelation*, I, 174.

⁵⁵ Summarizing the evidence up to this point: (1) both statements are set in the context of the cosmic conflict and are subservient to the larger story line of Revelation and its plot; (2) the statements frame the description of the climactic phase of the conflict (12:17-14:12); (3) they are doublets, of which the second element must be seen as explicative of the first; (4) the first element, “the commandments of God,” is a subjective genitive; (5) the Christology of Revelation makes Jesus participate in the divine identity, favouring Jesus as the subject of the witness that is described.

Revelation's own definition of ἡ μαρτυρία Ἰησοῦ offers substantial support for this interpretation.

σύνδουλός σου εἰμι καὶ τῶν ἀδελφῶν σου τῶν ἔχόντων τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ·
τῷ θεῷ προσκύνησον. ἡ γὰρ μαρτυρία Ἰησοῦ ἐστὶν τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς προφητείας.

I am a fellow servant with you and your comrades who hold the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy (19:10).

The wording of the NRSV reproduced above renders this verse in a way that is fully compatible with the present interpretation.⁵⁶ Again, as in 6:9 and 12:17, Revelation refers to “those who have (τῶν ἔχόντων) the testimony of Jesus,” and this construction, as argued by Charles, favours the subjective genitive.⁵⁷ But the unsolicited explanation of this phrase has more far-reaching consequences for the reading of ἡ μαρτυρία Ἰησοῦ itself, for the light it sheds on ἡ πίστις Ἰησοῦ, and for the contribution of these phrases to the theology of Revelation.⁵⁸ John, himself engaged in a prophetic mission, is told that “the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of the prophecy,” meaning his own prophecy, to be sure,⁵⁹ but also including the entire body of Old

⁵⁶ There is virtual unanimity among English translations in favour of “the testimony of Jesus” in 19:10. Exceptions are the NEB, “Those who bear testimony to Jesus are inspired like the prophets” (objective genitive), and the GNB, “For the truth that Jesus revealed is what inspires the prophets” (subjective genitive).

⁵⁷ In 6:9 Charles (*Revelation*, I, 174), as noted, gives an excellent reason for Jesus as the witnessing subject. However, despite the similarity of the expressions and same verbal element in 6:9, 12:17, and 19:10, he makes 12:17 and 19:10 objective genitives, “the witness to Jesus” (*Revelation*, II, 130). Aune (*Revelation 1-5*, 81; *Revelation 17-22*, 1038-39) argues that the historical Jesus is not in view and thus it cannot be Jesus’ testimony. Instead, the phrase should be seen as an objective genitive referring to the believers’ testimony, “For the testimony concerning Jesus is the Spirit of prophecy.”

⁵⁸ While not interpreting the verse, Longenecker (“Revelation 19,10,” 230-37) offers cogent textual and contextual reasons why it should be seen as integral to Revelation’s message.

⁵⁹ Rev 22:6-9 closely parallels 19:9-10. The references to “the God of the spirits of the prophets” (22:6) and to “your brothers the prophets” (22:9) raise the question whether “the prophets” are people contemporary to John or prophets from the Old Testament era. In the latter case they serve the cause of confirming John’s own credentials, holding him to be a prophet in the highest tradition of Old Testament prophecy. While it cannot be ruled out that these verses also refer to contemporary “prophets,” the case for seeing John in the lineage of Old Testament prophecy appears stronger. To Bauckham (*Climax of Prophecy*, ix), John’s work represents “the climax of prophetic revelation, which gathered up the prophetic meaning of the Old Testament scriptures and disclosed the way in which it was being and was to be fulfilled in the last days.” If so, the references to “the prophets” accord with the view

Testament prophecy, the imprint of which is seen on nearly every concept, symbol, and verse of Revelation.⁶⁰ Understanding ἡ μαρτυρία Ἰησοῦ as the embodiment, interpretation, and culmination of all prior revelation aligns this phrase closely with ἡ πίστις Ἰησοῦ, understood as ‘the faithfulness of Jesus.’ These expressions are two of a kind, conditioned by Old Testament antecedents, offering the faithful witness of Jesus as the fulfilment and true expression of the prophetic inspiration.

The Nuances of the Verbal Qualifier

The verbal qualifier of ἡ πίστις Ἰησοῦ is the present active participle of the verb τηρεῖν, for which Louw-Nida offers three distinct categories of meaning, ‘to guard,’ ‘to keep,’ and ‘to obey.’ The word occurs a total of eleven times in Revelation, and it is also a highly characteristic word in Johannine literature.⁶¹ In these writings the meaning of τηρεῖν spans all the possibilities listed above. It is of special interest that in six of the seven occurrences of τηρεῖν in 1 John, it refers to the ‘keeping’ of ‘his commandments’ (1 John 2:3, 4; 3:22, 24; 5:3) or to the keeping of ‘his word’ (1 John 2:5).

that Revelation “understands itself to be the culmination of the whole biblical tradition” (Bauckham, *Revelation*, 144).

⁶⁰ Although Vogelgesang’s study (“Ezekiel in Revelation”) labours under his comparative objective, aiming to show how Revelation is distinctive and transformative of the apocalyptic genre, his point that “the testimony of Jesus” is a key concept that explains how John understands the prophetic message seems certain. In his interpretation “the testimony of Jesus” is naturally and convincingly defined by the centrality of the slaughtered Lamb in Revelation 5. G. W. H. Lampe (“The Testimony of Jesus is the Spirit of Prophecy [Rev 19:10], in *The New Testament Age* [ed. William C. Weinrich; London: Mercer University Press, 1984], 245-58) implies that the subjective genitive interpretation is encumbered with vagueness as to what the content of “the testimony of Jesus” might be. This concern seems wholly unwarranted.

⁶¹ In the Gospel of John various forms of τηρεῖν occur a total of eighteen times (John 2:10; 8:51, 52, 55; 9:16; 12:7; 14:15, 21, 23, 24; 15:10 (x 2), 20 (x 2); 17:6, 11, 12, 15). In 1 John it is used seven times (1 John 2:3, 4, 5; 3:22, 24; 5:3, 18).

Expanding the lexical meanings, 'to guard' comes with the implication 'to attend carefully' and 'to take care of,'⁶² also including 'to retain in custody' and 'to keep watch over.'⁶³ τηρεῖν with the meaning 'to keep' is represented as 'to cause one to persevere or stand firm in a thing'⁶⁴ or as 'to cause a state, condition, or activity to continue,' 'to preserve.'⁶⁵ The third alternative, 'to obey,' has the connotation 'to show oneself to be actually holding a thing fast' and 'to observe,'⁶⁶ or 'to persist in obedience' and 'to pay attention to.'⁶⁷

The question that remains to be addressed is whether the verbal qualifier τηρεῖν is compatible with the interpretation that sees ἡ πίστις Ἰησοῦ as a subjective genitive meaning "the faithfulness of Jesus." Several strands of evidence are relevant in order to determine the answer to this question. Aware that οἱ τηροῦντες is immediately related to τὰς ἐντολάς τοῦ θεοῦ and only secondarily to τὴν πίστιν Ἰησοῦ (14:12), Aune writes that it "appears somewhat awkward in this context for the noun τὴν πίστιν, "faithfulness," to be used as the object of the verb τηρεῖν, "keep," since τηρεῖν must then be understood to have two simultaneous meanings, "obey" with τὰς ἐντολάς, "the commandments," and "remain, maintain" with τὴν πίστιν."⁶⁸ He nevertheless finds this alternative the most plausible, supported by the idiom πίστιν τηρεῖν known to be in

⁶² Thayer's Greek Lexicon, art. τηρέω.

⁶³ BDAG, art. τηρέω, 1002.

⁶⁴ Thayer's Greek Lexicon, art. τηρέω.

⁶⁵ BDAG, 1002.

⁶⁶ Thayer's Greek Lexicon, art. τηρέω.

⁶⁷ BDAG, 1002. According to BDAG, τηρεῖν in Rev 12:17 and 14:12 belongs in the category 'observe/obey.'

⁶⁸ Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 837.

wide usage, with the meaning 'to keep a pledge.'⁶⁹ On these grounds, giving τηρεῖν two meanings in the phrase, Aune arrives at the translation "keeping the commands of God and maintaining faithfulness to Jesus."⁷⁰

Whether the assumption of fluid meaning is justified in this instance need not be settled in order to concede that Revelation on several occasions leaves the translator with a number of options for τηρεῖν that seem equally legitimate and defensible. When the church in Philadelphia, despite its weak state, receives the commendation, "and yet you have kept (ἐτήρησάς) my word and have not denied my name" (3:8), it is debatable whether the best rendition of τηρεῖν is 'you have held fast to my word,' 'preserved my word,' or 'obeyed my word.'⁷¹ All three options are conceivable in terms of authorial intent, and all are plausible in terms of what the Philadelphians have actually done. If, in the case of the commendation to the church in Philadelphia, 'my commandments' (ἐτήρησάς μου τὰς ἐντολάς) is substituted for 'my words' (ἐτήρησάς μου τὸν λόγον), it is unlikely that the scope of the author's commendation has been significantly altered, and it follows that 'keeping my commandments' requires a deeper depth of field than what is conveyed when 'keeping' and 'commandments' are conceived with 'obeying' as the only legitimate meaning.⁷² Particularly compelling in the present context is the use of τηρεῖν in the commendation to the church in Philadelphia, ὅτι ἐτήρησας τὸν

⁶⁹ Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 837-38. While the idiom πίστιν τηρεῖν may shed light on Rev 14:12, it seems more likely that the use of τηρεῖν in the rest of Revelation and the Old Testament background of πίστις-terminology are more decisive.

⁷⁰ Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 783.

⁷¹ Revelation 3:8, 10 and 22:7, 9 are texts that allow a high degree of ambiguity with respect to the meaning of τηρεῖν.

⁷² This is not to suggest that Revelation envisions a way of keeping "the commandments of God" that does not include obeying them.

λόγον τῆς ὑπομονῆς μου (3:10). Here τηρεῖν is best rendered by 'preserved,' and what is preserved is 'the word of *my* endurance,' meaning the endurance of Jesus.⁷³

Additional factors are the explicative relationship between "the commandments of God" and "the faithfulness of Jesus" considered above, the likelihood that "the word of God" and "the commandments of God" are virtually interchangeable (1:2, 9; 12:17; 14:12; 20:4), and the close connection between 'to keep' (τηρεῖν) and 'to have' (ἔχειν) in these phrases (3:8; 12:17).⁷⁴ Verbally and conceptually these terms have, as noted earlier, a Johannine ring. A particularly fascinating example of how these terms overlap and interrelate is found in the Gospel of John.

They who have (ὁ ἔχων) my commandments and keep (τηρῶν) them are those who love (ὁ ἀγαπῶν) me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them (John 14:21).

This leaves at least three possibilities for the subjective genitive interpretation of ἡ πίστις Ἰησοῦ that reads πίστις as 'faithfulness.' The first alternative relates the verbal element to τὰς ἐντολάς τοῦ θεοῦ only, holding τὴν πίστιν Ἰησοῦ in an explicative relationship, 'those who keep the commandments of God as revealed by the faithfulness of Jesus.' The second option accepts the need for a verbal qualifier for τὴν πίστιν Ἰησοῦ, as well, but this qualifier will not be τηρεῖν. Instead, the missing verbal element will be imported from the parallel phrase in 12:17, and will read, in 14:12, οἱ τηροῦντες τὰς ἐντολάς τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ [ἔχοντες] τὴν πίστιν Ἰησοῦ, 'those who keep the

⁷³ Among the major English translations, only the NASB has the straightforward, "you have kept the word of My perseverance." This interpretation is supported by Charles (*Revelation* I, 89), who takes "the word of my endurance" to mean "the Gospel of the endurance practised by Christ."

⁷⁴ There are actually three different verbs vying for similar function in closely related statements, ἔχειν ('to have') and τηρεῖν ('to keep'), as noted, and κρατεῖν ('to hold on to'). While all three verbs have distinct meanings, they overlap with respect to the sense of 'preserving, holding on to.' For instance, "you are holding fast to (κρατεῖς) my name" (2:13); "you have some there who hold to (κρατοῦντας) the teaching" (2:14); "who do not hold (ἔχουσιν) this teaching" (2:24); "you have kept (ἐτήρησας) my word" (3:8).

commandments of God and [have] the faithfulness of Jesus.’⁷⁵ Finally, the third option will settle for one verbal qualifier only, but it will tilt the meaning of τηρεῖν in the direction of ‘preserve,’ justifying this decision by the fact that this is well within the range of legitimate options for τηρεῖν, and it reflects better the influence of the parallel statement in 12:17. In this option the meaning of τηρεῖν will lie close to ἔχειν, so close, in fact, that the influence of the latter will be decisive, οἱ τηροῦντες [ἔχοντες] τὰς ἐντολάς τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὴν πίστιν Ἰησοῦ, ‘those who preserve the commandments of God as revealed by the faithfulness of Jesus.’

It follows from the foregoing that ‘the faithfulness of Jesus’ must be considered a legitimate translation of ἡ πίστις Ἰησοῦ. This phrase hews close to the story line in Revelation, recalling the attempt to subvert the divine government and the cosmic incomprehension in the face of the means employed in order to set things right. Seeing ‘the faithfulness of Jesus’ in an explicative relationship to “the commandments of God,” these intimately related phrases project the primordial aspiration to overturn the divine government onto the screen of end-time events. The high Christology of Revelation gives to Jesus the unrestricted mandate to define, exemplify, and vindicate the character of God and the divine government. While the evidence for this conclusion is abundant within Revelation, needing no witness other than its own, the role of Jesus with respect to the character of God in Revelation, too, may be conceptualized and articulated by the Johannine assertion, “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9). If “the testimony of Jesus” is seen as a subjective genitive, referring to the testimony given by Jesus, the explicative relationship between “the testimony of Jesus” and “the commandments of God” (12:17) indicates that ἡ πίστις Ἰησοῦ runs on a parallel track,

⁷⁵ ‘Having’ is here understood in the sense of ‘preserving.’

representing yet another argument in favour of ‘the faithfulness of Jesus.’ I suggest that the argument is more easily made on behalf of “the testimony of Jesus” only because this interpretation is more familiar and not because the case for ‘the faithfulness of Jesus’ is more difficult to sustain. Finally, the polyvalence of the verbal qualifier τηρεῖν squares well with this translation, bringing to view a legacy or a trust that is safeguarded and preserved as well as ‘kept’ in the sense of put into practice.

Judgement as to whether these arguments are sufficient to lift ‘the faithfulness of Jesus’ from the level of a legitimate interpretation to the level of one that should be preferred must await the assessment of the remaining three options.

The Faith of Jesus

The second alternative for a subjective genitive interpretation of τὴν πίστιν Ἰησοῦ reads πίστις as ‘faith’ rather than ‘faithfulness.’ The two meanings of faith that should be distinguished are faith as the confidence in God demonstrated by Jesus, and faith in a doctrinal sense.

The Faith Demonstrated by Jesus

Even though “the faith of Jesus” lies close to ‘the faithfulness of Jesus,’ these two options do not reflect the meaning of ἡ πίστις Ἰησοῦ in identical terms. On the one hand, Jesus’ faith stands in a seamless relationship to his faithfulness. In that case his faith will be the deeper stratum of the bivalent πίστις, that is, the disposition on which his faithfulness is predicated. On the other hand, however, the terminology threatens to conceal differences in emphasis and meaning because the distinctions may not be expressed by these words in themselves. Complementary ranges of meaning and even quite significant differences may emerge depending on the perspective and point of reference for the same words.

"The faith of Jesus" connotes 'the faith Jesus demonstrated in his earthly existence.' Such a view brings "the faith of Jesus" in Revelation close to the emphasis on "the faith of Jesus Christ" in recent attempts to revise the faith-language in the letters of Paul.⁷⁶ In the Pauline context, references to πίστις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ should according to the revised view be read as subjective genitives, denoting "the faith of Jesus Christ."⁷⁷ To Hays, for instance, "the faith of Jesus Christ" in Galatians makes Christ "the representative figure in whom the drama of salvation is enacted, in whose destiny the destiny of all is carried," and in this sense there is soteriological significance to Jesus' faith.⁷⁸ Essentially agreeing with Hays' proposition, J. Louis Martyn suggests that Paul's use of *pistis Christou* refers to an act that was carried out *in Christ*. Paul's primary emphasis, therefore, is not on faith *in* Christ but on the faith(fulness) *of* Christ in a representative sense.⁷⁹

In these examples there is very little difference between Jesus' faithfulness and his faith. By "the faith of Jesus" is meant the faith demonstrated by Jesus in his humanity. In this notion of faith, 'faithfulness' lies close at hand as the implied and indispensable corollary.⁸⁰ In a secondary sense, moreover, the faith exercised by Jesus

⁷⁶ Cf. Johannes Haussleiter, "Der Glaube Jesu und der Christliche Glaube," *NKZ* 2 (1891), 109-45, 205-30; Gerhard Kittel, "πίστις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ bei Paulus," *TSK* 79 (1906), 419-36; Gabriel Hebert, "'Faithfulness' and 'Faith,'" *The Reformed Theological Review* 14 (1955), 33-40; Thomas Torrance, "One Aspect of the Biblical Conception of Faith," *ExpT* 68 (1957), 111-14; D. W. B. Robinson, "'Faith of Jesus Christ' – a New Testament Debate," *The Reformed Theological Review* 29 (1970), 71-81; George Howard, "The 'Faith of Christ,'" *ExpT* 85 (1974), 213-14; Richard B. Hays, *The Faith of Jesus Christ*; idem., "ΠΙΣΤΙΣ and Pauline Christology: What Is at Stake?" *SBL Seminar Papers* 1991, 714-29; Sam K. Williams, "Again *Pistis Christou*," *CBQ* 49 (1987), 431-47.

⁷⁷ The salient passages are Rom 3:22, 25, 26; Gal 2:16, 20; 3:22; Phil 3:9.

⁷⁸ Hays, *Faith of Jesus Christ*, 151-52.

⁷⁹ J. Louis Martyn, *Galatians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB; New York: Doubleday, 1997), 270-71.

⁸⁰ This is especially the case in interpretations of πίστις Χριστοῦ that reads the phrase as referring specifically to 'the faithfulness of Jesus'; cf. Douglas A. Campbell, *The Rhetoric of Righteousness in Romans 3:21-26* (JSNTSup 65; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992); idem., "Romans 1:17 – A *Crux Interpretum* for the ΠΙΣΤΙΣ ΧΡΙΣΤΟΥ debate," *JBL* 113 (1994), 265-85; Bruce

in his humanity is predicated on his confidence in God's faithfulness. Thus, an emphasis on God's faithfulness is not absent in this interpretation.

The subjective genitive interpretation of πίστις Χριστοῦ in Paul has been criticized on semantic and exegetical grounds.⁸¹ A leading argument in this criticism, perhaps the leading argument, concerns the absence of the article in the Pauline construction. Following Ernest De Witt Burton,⁸² Arland Hultgren⁸³ and James Dunn⁸⁴ contend that the absence of the article is indicative of an objective genitive, "faith in Christ."

Even if this assertion were valid with respect to Pauline usage,⁸⁵ it is an objection that does not apply to Revelation for the simple reason that John uses the article with πίστις, speaking decidedly of τὴν πίστιν Ἰησοῦ (14:12). To the extent that the absence of the article is taken to work in favour of an objective genitive interpretation in Paul, its presence in Revelation should have the opposite effect.

In another argument against the subjective genitive interpretation, Philip F. Esler asserts that in Romans "the argument for the subjective reading is so weak as to qualify

W. Longenecker, "ΠΙΣΤΙΣ in Romans 3:25: New Evidence for the 'Faithfulness of Christ'?" *NTS* 39 (1993), 478-80; idem., *The Triumph of Abraham's God: The Transformation of Identity in Galatians* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1998), 89-107; Tonstad, "πίστις Χριστοῦ: Reading Paul in A New Paradigm," 37-59.

⁸¹ Cf. Arland Hultgren, "The *Pistis Christou* Formulation in Paul," *NovT* 22 (1980), 247-63; James Dunn, "Once More, ΠΙΣΤΙΣ ΧΡΙΣΤΟΥ," *SBL Seminar Papers 1991*, 730-44; Barry Matlock, "Detheologizing the ΠΙΣΤΙΣ ΧΡΙΣΤΟΥ Debate: Cautionary Remarks from a Lexical Semantic Perspective," *NovT* 42 (2000), 1-23.

⁸² Ernest De Witt Burton (*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians* [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1921], 482) finds that when a subjective genitive is intended in connection with πίστις, the article is "almost invariably present."

⁸³ Hultgren ("*Pistis Christou*," 253) is less judicious than Burton, claiming that "when Paul uses the term πίστις followed by a genitive which is clearly understood to be subjective, the article is invariably present before πίστις" (emphasis mine)

⁸⁴ Dunn ("Once More," 732-33) is somewhat less confident in the strength of Burton's argument.

⁸⁵ In Rom 3:3, τὴν πίστιν τοῦ θεοῦ is a subjective genitive and arthrous, but its equivalent, δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ in Rom 3:21 is anarthrous, though also subjective. The usefulness of the article as a distinguishing feature becomes even less tenable by the example of Abraham's faith in Rom 4:16, where the genitive is subjective, but the article is absent.

as one of the ‘emperor has no clothes’ variety.”⁸⁶ As evidence for this starkly negative verdict, he points out that in Romans Jesus is never the subject of the verb πιστεύω “and is never described as πιστός.”⁸⁷ While this objection seems doubtful in terms of disqualifying Jesus as the subject of the πίστις Χριστοῦ construction in Paul,⁸⁸ it does not in the slightest diminish the prospect of a subjective genitive reading of ἡ πίστις Ἰησοῦ in the idiom of Revelation. There, Jesus is twice referred to as ὁ μάρτυς, ὁ πιστός (1:5; 3:14) and once as πιστός καὶ ἀληθινός (19:11), indicating that whatever may be claimed with respect to the πίστις language in Paul’s writings, ‘faithfulness’ lies clearly within the purview of this term in Revelation, and Jesus may well be the subject. Again, if the absence of the epithet πιστός, applied to Jesus, is taken to be an argument against a subjective genitive reading of πίστις Χριστοῦ in Romans, its presence counts as evidence to the contrary in Revelation.

In addition, even in Paul’s letters the objection to the subjective genitive reading does not relate to the risk of defective theology. Dunn, who opposes the subjective genitive reading of πίστις Χριστοῦ in Paul, makes it clear that “the *theology* of the subjective genitive reading is powerful, important and attractive. For anyone who

⁸⁶ Philip F. Esler, *Conflict and Identity in Romans. The Social Setting of Paul's Letter* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 157.

⁸⁷ Esler, *Conflict and Identity*, 157.

⁸⁸ Esler’s objection, emphasizing that in Romans Jesus is never the subject of πιστεύω, works better when πίστις is understood as ‘faith’ and less well when it is understood as ‘faithfulness.’ The assertion that the subjective genitive reading of πίστις Χριστοῦ belongs in the “emperor has no clothes” category would not be shared by Kittel (πίστις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, 424), who claimed to the contrary that Paul “would frankly have expressed himself in an unintelligible manner if he had intended to speak about faith in Jesus.” While it is true that the argument on behalf of the subjective genitive interpretation of πίστις Χριστοῦ in Paul tends to emphasize the narrative underpinning of his logic, the case for such an underlying narrative is far stronger than Esler makes it out to be; cf. A. Katherine Grieb, *The Story of Romans: A Narrative Defense of God's Righteousness* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), xvii-xxiv, 35-38; Douglas A. Campbell, “The Story of Jesus in Romans and Galatians” in *Narrative Dynamics in Paul* (ed. Bruce W. Longenecker; Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 97-124; N. T. Wright, *Paul for Everyone: Romans. Part One* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 42-59.

wishes to take the humanness of Jesus with full seriousness 'the faith of Jesus' strikes a strong and resonant chord. Moreover, as a theological motif, it seems to me wholly compatible with Paul's theology."⁸⁹

While the subjective genitive interpretation can be defended in Revelation even more easily than in Paul's letters, the theological horizons may not differ as much as has traditionally been assumed. Richard B. Hays, basing his view on Paul's use of the Old Testament, faults the traditional interpretation of Paul for failing to see that "Paul's argument is primarily an argument about theodicy, not about soteriology. The driving question in Romans is not "How can I find a gracious God?" but "How can I trust in this allegedly gracious God if he abandons his promises to Israel?"⁹⁰ In Paul, too, there is an Old Testament undercurrent similar to the one articulated the martyrs in Revelation (6:9-10). Both express a concern about God's ways, the perception of a possible failure on the part of God to deliver according to what God has promised or is expected to be.

Thus, when Paul quotes Hab. 2:4,⁹¹ we cannot help hearing the echoes – unless we are tone-deaf – of Habakkuk's theodicy question. By showcasing this text – virtually as an epigraph – at the beginning of the letter to the Romans, Paul links his gospel to the Old Testament prophetic affirmation of God's justice and righteousness.⁹²

In fact, the question of whether God has given evidence of his reliability shows up even in interpretations of Paul that do not originate in the *πίστις Χριστοῦ*

⁸⁹ Dunn, "Once More," 744.

⁹⁰ Hays, *Echoes*, 53.

⁹¹ The question in Habakkuk, it will be remembered, begins with the plaintive, "How long?" (Hab 1:2). The answer in Hab 2:4 speaks of the revelation of God's faithfulness. Paul refers to this verse in Rom 1:17 and Gal 3:11. I suggest that the allusion in Rev 6:10 has the same or a similar Old Testament point of reference.

⁹² Hays, *Echoes*, 40.

controversy. In a little book on the apostle Paul, E. P. Sanders describes Paul's discussion of the fate of the Jews as a problem of theodicy.

Doubts about God's constancy led to the theological problem called 'theodicy', the 'righteousness of God'. God, we have seen, should not be capricious. ... Has God been fair, honest, just, reliable, and constant? The two dispensations seem to indicate not. Only if Paul can hold them together can he save God's reputation.⁹³

This concern rings familiar in the context of the present reading of Revelation. If the need to "save God's reputation" arises in the context of Paul's letters, and as more than a minor tributary to the dominant current of his theology, there should be less hesitancy to pursue this theme in Revelation. Hearing the echoes of the great theodicy questions in the Old Testament; ascertaining the lingering imprint of the Old Testament on the faith-language of the New Testament; encountering the need to "save God's reputation" – all these turn the issue back to the question of God's faithfulness.

On this point it seems valid, worthwhile, and even necessary to preserve a distinction between 'the faithfulness of Jesus' and "the faith of Jesus" as legitimate renditions of ἡ πίστις Ἰησοῦ in Revelation. I suggest that the most significant distinction between these two options resides in the Christology that is implied.⁹⁴ Both readings assume that there is an unresolved concern with respect to God's ways, whether from the point of view of the rebellion of 'the Shining One', or in the light of God's remedy for the reality of evil. To the extent that God is thought to be at fault, or rather, to the extent that intelligent beings are perplexed with respect to God's ways, only *God* can redeem God's reputation. Assuming this problem to be evident in the story line, the present interpretation has emphasized that 'the faithfulness of Jesus' explicates the faithfulness of God, thus absorbing and expressing the issue that lies at

⁹³ E. P. Sanders, *Paul* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 118.

⁹⁴ Note that Dunn ("Once More," 744) connects "the faith of Christ" in Paul to "the *humanness* of Jesus."

the core of the cosmic conflict. In Christological terms this can only be done when the intimate relationship between God and Jesus is maintained on the level of character and ontology.

Although the distinction may seem slight, I suggest that when “the faith of Jesus” is construed mainly in terms of the *human* Jesus and his faithfulness, it remedies, but it does not completely rectify, the most shattering predicament in the theodicy question that is brought to view in Revelation.⁹⁵ Jesus’ faith *in* God and his faithfulness *to* God testify to the faithfulness *of* God. Nevertheless, only when Jesus is seen as the *Amen* (3:14), appropriating the divine insignia and character (Isa 65:16), has the gap been closed so as to make ‘the faithfulness of Jesus’ the definitive and irreducible revelation of God’s faithfulness.⁹⁶

The Faith of Jesus in a Doctrinal Sense

When “the faith of Jesus” is understood in a doctrinal sense, it does not refer to the faith of the historical Jesus but has the connotation corresponding to ‘the Christian faith.’ Beale finds this meaning to be best categorized as a genitive of source that refers “to the doctrinal content of the Christian faith.”⁹⁷ This meaning corresponds to Jude’s exhortation to “contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints” (Jude 1:3). Moreover, many of the messages to the seven churches in Revelation show that

⁹⁵ The distinctive Christological outlook between ‘the faithfulness of Jesus’ and “the faith of Jesus” walks a fine line that should be seen as one of emphasis rather than as a fundamental, qualitative distinction. Neither emphasis proposes to view the human and the divine in Jesus independent from each other, but ‘the faithfulness of Jesus’ assigns priority to the notion of divine faithfulness in ἡ πίστις Ἰησοῦ.

⁹⁶ In the context of the πίστις Χριστοῦ debate in Paul, Hays (“ΠΙΣΤΙΣ,” 727) writes that the relationship between Christology and soteriology appears elusive; the problem is to grasp “*how* the death of Jesus can be understood to be the source of salvation.” He confides that “I still cannot, I am sorry to say, offer a satisfactory elucidation of this mystery.” Humility on this point is well advised. There is, indeed, no less cause for humility on this point even though the cosmic conflict framework brings back a missing dimension to the subject.

⁹⁷ Beale, *Revelation*, 766.

the struggle for a true and pure doctrine is a grave concern, whether the threat takes the form of “the works of the Nicolaitans” (τὰ ἔργα τῶν Νικολαϊτῶν) in the Ephesian church (2:6); “the teaching of Balaam” (τὴν διδασχὴν Βαλαάμ) and “the teaching of the Nicolaitans” (τὴν διδασχὴν [τῶν] Νικολαϊτῶν) in Pergamum; or as the woman Jezebel in Thyatira, who is “teaching and beguiling my servants” (2:20), and where, conversely, there is a commendation to those “who do not hold this teaching” (τὴν διδασχὴν ταύτην; 2:24).

False teaching, then, seems to be a menace to believers in Revelation, and in this sense “the faith of Jesus” may well imply “the doctrinal content of the Christian faith.”⁹⁸ Nevertheless, this terminology seems unduly stilted and more reflective of doctrinal and dogmatic preoccupations of the church beyond the days of John. More significantly, ἡ ὑπομονὴ καὶ ἡ πίστις τῶν ἁγίων in Revelation’s eschatological scenario relates to the prospect of believers’ following in the footsteps of Jesus, signifying willing captivity or even violent death (13:10). Strict emphasis on doctrinal content, even if legitimate, falls short of this mark; that is, it fails to capture the existential crisis, whether this crisis is imminent or eventual. For this reason a mere doctrinal connotation ἡ πίστις Ἰησοῦ seems inadequate.

Faith in Jesus

The two main objective genitive readings of ἡ πίστις Ἰησοῦ diverge on whether πίστις should be read as ‘faith’ or ‘faithfulness,’ yielding either “faith *in* Jesus” or “faithfulness *to* Jesus.” Several elements are worthy of note with respect to reading the phrase as “faith in Jesus.” First, in the expression τὰς ἐντολάς τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὴν πίστιν Ἰησοῦ, the first part, τὰς ἐντολάς τοῦ θεοῦ, remains a subjective genitive while τὴν

⁹⁸ Beale, *Revelation*, 766.

πίστιν Ἰησοῦ must be read as an objective genitive, those “who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus” (14:12, NASB). Second, the relationship between these two elements becomes complementary and contrastive rather than explicative. Two factors are in view, “the commandments of God” and “the faith in Jesus.” While it may be correct to say that one leads to the other, they are conceptually and relationally distinct.⁹⁹ Third, while at least some and perhaps all references to ἡ μαρτυρία Ἰησοῦ assume a subjective genitive,¹⁰⁰ and while ἡ μαρτυρία Ἰησοῦ and ἡ πίστις Ἰησοῦ stand in a parallel relationship (12:17; 14:12), the parallelism is broken when ἡ πίστις Ἰησοῦ is read as “faith in Jesus.” The former (ἡ μαρτυρία Ἰησοῦ) refers to Jesus’ own testimony, the latter (ἡ πίστις Ἰησοῦ) is understood to speak of the believer’s faith in Jesus. Fourth, there is a tendency among at least some interpreters who favour “faith in Jesus” for ἡ πίστις Ἰησοῦ to assume the self-evident validity of this interpretation rather than to argue it with respect to some of the concerns that have been addressed in the present discussion.¹⁰¹

On this point it is important to clarify whether “the commandments of God” and ‘the faith in Jesus’ in Revelation conform to Luther’s paradigm of law and gospel.¹⁰² In his *Lectures on Galatians* Luther says that “whoever knows well how to distinguish the Gospel from the Law should give thanks to God and know that he is a real

⁹⁹ Beckwith (*Apocalypse*, 659) downplays the dual and complementary connotation, claiming that “the commands of God are summed up in a living faith in Jesus.”

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Abir, *Cosmic Conflict*, 209.

¹⁰¹ This criticism applies to Swete (*Apocalypse*, 186) and to some extent to Charles *Revelation*, I, 369).

¹⁰² It is well to be aware that according to the Lutheran scholar Gustav Aulén (*Christus Victor*, 101-22), Luther’s notion of the atonement conforms to the ‘classical’ view, emphasizing victory over the evil powers.

theologian.”¹⁰³ In Luther’s model Gospel and Law are to be, respectively, “like the light and the day, and the other like the darkness and the night.”¹⁰⁴ Mixing or conflating these terms put both at risk. “If we could only put an even greater distance between them!” Luther exclaims wistfully.¹⁰⁵ Failure to make this distinction calls forth Luther’s disapproval, and if this failure should be found in John, too, Revelation runs the risk of becoming subject to the same censure.¹⁰⁶

At face value “the commandments of God” and “faith in Jesus” seem tantalizingly close to Luther’s categories of Law and Gospel, but this impression is likely to be inadequate and even misleading. Even the fact that the word “gospel” (εὐαγγέλιον) is used to describe the message of the first angel in the immediate context of the exhortation to maintain τὴν πίστιν Ἰησοῦ (14:6-7), and despite the angel’s announcement that “the hour of his judgment has come” (ὅτι ἦλθεν ἡ ὥρα τῆς κρίσεως αὐτοῦ), the context and horizon of these terms should not be limited to Luther’s soteriological concerns. The message of the first angel is at pains to distinguish itself as good news that must be defined according to its own context,¹⁰⁷ and “the hour of his judgment” is as suggestive of the decisive revelatory moment in the cosmic conflict as

¹⁰³ Martin Luther, *Lectures on Galatians 1535, chapters 1-4* (ed. and trans. Jaroslav Pelikan, vol. 26 in *Luther’s works*, 115.

¹⁰⁴ Luther, *Galatians*, 342.

¹⁰⁵ Luther, *Galatians*, 342.

¹⁰⁶ Most likely Revelation’s ambiguity with respect to ‘law’ and ‘gospel’ played a role in Luther’s disparagement of Revelation and contributed to the low esteem in which this book was held by the leading Reformers; cf. *Luther’s Works* 35, 398-99.

¹⁰⁷ The first angel in John’s vision of the divine countermeasures in the final conflict proclaims εὐαγγέλιον αἰώνιον, ‘an eternal good message’ (14:6). The expression lacks the definite article, setting it apart from nearly all other instances where the word εὐαγγέλιον is used in the New Testament. The anarthrous εὐαγγέλιον implies that this ‘gospel’ has not been defined by previous occurrences. This view, taking the absence of the definite article and the context as the most telling distinctives, has won support among many scholars; cf. Charles, *Revelation*, II, 12; Lohmeyer, *Offenbarung* (1926), 21; Lohse, *Offenbarung*, 85; Ford, *Revelation*, 236; Mounce, *Revelation*, 272; Prigent, *L’Apocalypse*, 225; Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 825. Caird (*Revelation*, 182) argues emphatically that the gospel in Revelation is the Pauline gospel, and Beale (*Revelation*, 748) attributes the absence of the article to mere stylistic variation.

of the proclamation of a judicial verdict.¹⁰⁸ Instead, the urgent heralding of “an eternally valid message” (εὐαγγέλιον αἰώνιον), calling on all the inhabitants of the earth to “fear God and give him glory” (14:6-7), conforms not only to the broad scope of the Old Testament passages from which these terms derive¹⁰⁹ but also to the matter that lies at the heart of the cosmic conflict: God’s reliability and the means by which it has been revealed.

For this reason “the commandments of God” and ‘the faith in Jesus,’ accepting “faith in Jesus” as a possible reading for ἡ πίστις Ἰησοῦ, may not represent the polarities of Law and Gospel that Luther considered the basic premise of good theology because the terms in Revelation are configured according to a different modus and resist the polarization urged on these concepts by Luther and accepted by a long theological tradition. While it is factually appropriate to assume that the believers who hold to τῇν

¹⁰⁸ The messages of the three angels (14:6-11) are pronouncements against the opposing side and warnings against accepting or complying with its programme, each message reflecting the progressive unfolding and intensification of the opponent’s intent. Its judgment, consequently, finds expression in what happens and becomes manifest in history and not only in a divine verdict on something that has happened. Ellul (*Apocalypse*, 172) may be overly categorical but nevertheless essentially on target with respect to the judgment in Rev 14:7. “The judgment being never juridical but revelatory, it is not the expression of the servile terror of men, but of their comprehension of the divine reality.” Charles Masson (“L’Évangile éternel de Apocalypse 14.6 et 7,” in *Hommage et Reconnaissance, recueil de travaux publié à l’occasion du soixantième anniversaire de Karl Barth* [Neuchâtel: Delachaux & Niestlé, 1946], 63-67) also shows that the context of the proclamation is the unfolding of the final crisis.

¹⁰⁹ The likely Old Testament passages reflected in the ‘eternal gospel’ of Rev 14:6 are Ps 96:1-13 and 1 Chron 16:8-36, both of which contain the most salient ideas found in Rev 14:6 and express them in similar terms. Bauckham (*Climax of Prophecy*, 286-7) makes a convincing case for Ps 96:2 as the locus from which the expression εὐαγγέλιον αἰώνιον is derived. The heralding of judgment in this Psalm is not to be construed as though the Judge has been absent from the world, making a late appearance in order to call everyone to account. His salvation is “from day to day” (Ps 96:2; 1 Chron 16:23), an eternally valid message, and “his judgments are [already] in all the earth” (1 Chron 16:14). If the meaning of the word ‘gospel’ is good news, then this message answers to that meaning in the fullest and most emphatic sense. But if the meaning of ‘the gospel’ is limited to the message of personal salvation, it becomes a straitjacket too confining for the broad scope of these affirmations and the message they pour into the proclamation of the first angel in Rev 14:6. What is set right in the gospel proclamation and the judgment message of the Old Testament poems goes beyond the sinner’s status before God. It deals with humanity’s perception of God’s reputation and character more than with the legal standing of any one human being. When the Psalmist announces, that “he is coming, for he is coming to judge the earth,” he specifies the means in terms that are dear to the theme of Revelation: “He will judge the world with righteousness, and the peoples with his truth” (Ps 96:13), that is, with his *faithfulness* (בְּאֱמֻנָהוּ). Cf. also Willem Alink, “1 Chronicles 16:8-36 as Literary Source for Revelation 14:6-7,” *AUSS* 22 (1984), 187-96.

πίστιν Ἰησοῦ have “faith in Jesus” in many conceivable meanings of the term, the main liability of this option is the risk of losing the connection to the story line of Revelation and the theme of cosmic conflict.¹¹⁰

Faithfulness to Jesus

Reading πίστις as ‘faithfulness’ and ἡ πίστις Ἰησοῦ as an objective genitive “faithfulness to Jesus” is an alternative that has come into vogue quite recently in important English translations of Revelation¹¹¹ and as the preferred interpretation in a number of modern commentaries.¹¹² It is a reading that makes good sense in terms of echoing a central concern in the book.¹¹³ In fact, the strongest argument for “faithfulness to Jesus” is precisely that it reflects the book’s urgency that the believers prevail and remain unshaken by the trials and vicissitudes that will confront them. If this translation falls short on important points, it is not because it fails to resonate with a significant objective of Revelation.

Aune, as noted, finds support for the translation “faithfulness to Jesus” in the idiom πίστιν τηρεῖν used by Josephus, meaning ‘to keep a pledge.’¹¹⁴ The two constituents of the doublet, τὰς ἐντολὰς τοῦ θεοῦ and τὴν πίστιν Ἰησοῦ, are integrated on the practical rather than on the conceptual level. On the one hand, the believers in

¹¹⁰ Luther was certainly capable of setting criteria for what makes a good theologian in terms closer to Revelation. “*He deserves to be called a theologian, however, who comprehends the visible and manifest things of God seen through suffering and the cross;*” cf. *Career of the Reformer I* (trans. Harold J. Grimm; vol. 31 in *Luther’s works*; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1957), 52.

¹¹¹ As noted, “faithful to Jesus” or “loyal to Jesus” is the preference of the NEB (1976), GNB (1976), and NIV (1984). The German Einheitsübersetzung (1980) has “an der Treue zu Jesus” and the revised edition of the Français courant translation (1997) has “fidèles à Jésus.”

¹¹² Cf. Barclay, *The Revelation of John II*, 112; Roloff, *Revelation*, 176; Aune, *Revelation I-5*, 81; *Revelation 6-16*, 837-38; Osborne, *Revelation*, 543-44.

¹¹³ This concern is reflected in the frequent reference to ὑπομονή, ‘patience,’ ‘perseverance,’ or ‘endurance’ (1:9; 2:2, 3, 19; 3:10; 13:10; 14:12) and in the even more numerous usages of various forms of νικᾶω, ‘to overcome,’ ‘to prevail’ (2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21; 12:11; 15:2; 17:4; 21:7).

¹¹⁴ Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 837-38.

view keep “the commandments of God,” and, on the other hand, they maintain “faithfulness to Jesus,” both of which reflect the disposition of faithfulness. Recalling that this alternative makes it necessary to give τηρεῖν two meanings in the phrase, the range of τηρεῖν indicates that this problem cannot be seen as a fatal objection, and the translation “keeping the commands of God and maintaining faithfulness to Jesus” therefore remains acceptable as far as this problem is concerned.¹¹⁵ In order to achieve consistency with respect to the parallel between τὰς ἐντολὰς τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ...τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ (12:17) and τὰς ἐντολὰς τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὴν πίστιν Ἰησοῦ (14:12), τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ must be read as an objective genitive, “the testimony *to* Jesus.”¹¹⁶

In Christological terms, “faithfulness to Jesus” is an option that can be reconciled with various views about Jesus. Specifically, this alternative is not dependent on the ontological assumption that is so decisive for the subjective genitive interpretation with respect to the relationship between Jesus and God. Moreover, the issue at the heart of the cosmic conflict moves to the periphery. Believers give “testimony *to* Jesus” (6:9; 12:17), and they are “faithful *to* Jesus” (14:12), reading τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ (12:17) and τὴν πίστιν Ἰησοῦ (14:12) as objective genitives. While both are factually reflective of what the believers actually do, they may ultimately be secondary to what is still more at stake in the cosmic conflict, that is, the testimony given by Jesus and his faithfulness.

Conclusion

¹¹⁵ Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 783.

¹¹⁶ Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 81.

In conclusion, all the four leading alternatives for the interpretation of ἡ πίστις Ἰησοῦ in Revelation claim a measure of legitimacy and relevancy. None of the possible options is entirely unacceptable even though they are not equally reflective of the Greek text and its larger context. The option that is proposed here as the best rendition has the formidable drawback that it is at present not found in any major English translation of the Bible. Nevertheless, more than one ingredient in the text tell in favour of ἡ πίστις Ἰησοῦ as ‘the faithfulness of Jesus.’

The most decisive element with respect to any of the available options is the story line. The present interpretation finds that the story line of Revelation is suffused with the reality of the cosmic conflict. The struggle that is to be resolved, on the terms of its own narrative, is a conflict that began primordially in heaven over the character and government of God. The option that reflects the story line most adequately is therefore the one that keeps the character of the divine government in view. On narrational terms this is best done when τὴν πίστιν Ἰησοῦ is read as a subjective genitive. This interpretation is further supported by a host of lesser elements. These include the need to appreciate the ‘constitutional’ connotation of “the commandments of God;” the explicative relationship between “the commandments of God” and τὴν πίστιν Ἰησοῦ; the likelihood that πίστις retains the connotation of ‘faithfulness;’ the Christology of Revelation, by which ‘the faithfulness of Jesus’ is reflective of the trustworthiness and constancy of God; the overlapping and almost synonymous flavour of “the testimony of Jesus” and ‘the faithfulness of Jesus;’ and the broad and multivalent scope of τηρεῖν. ‘What matters in this situation,’ meaning the situation that obtains on earth when the war that began in heaven comes to a climactic end, ‘is the perseverance of the saints, those who hold on to the commandments of God as revealed by the faithfulness of Jesus’ (14:12).

Indeed, hearing again the stirring ὦδε as a call to attention within a set of ominous and decisive situational parameters (14:12), there is warrant for a bolder prioritizing of the available options. For this purpose I can do no better than in all seriousness to borrow the lustre of another biblical passage, aiming to extol a series of exceptional values and yet not shy in terms of prioritizing them.¹¹⁷ Claiming a solid exegetical foundation as the launching pad for what is at stake, let this, then, be the conclusion of my inquiry: And so they endure, these four, 'the faithfulness of Jesus,' "the faith of Jesus," "faith in Jesus," and "faithfulness to Jesus," and greatest among these is the faithfulness of God in Jesus.

¹¹⁷ Cf. 1 Cor 13:13.

APPENDIX I

ATTENUATING THE INFLUENCE OF THE MYTH OF *NERO REDIVIVUS*

Introduction

As the present interpretation reads the evidence, neither the office of the emperor nor the imperial cult has the proportions to fully match the force of the symbols in Revelation on which this derivation is based. For all its villainy, or precisely *because* its tyrannical character is flaunted on the surface quite apart from any prophetic evaluation,¹ the Roman Empire does not express adequately the character and programme of the opposing side in the cosmic conflict. Indeed, the 'imperial' view constricts the range of options that should be considered as to the meaning of ἡ πύστις Ἰησοῦ because it is insufficiently attentive to the influence of the biblical narrative on the story line of Revelation. Even though the context of the Roman Empire remains important, it should not be seen as the ultimate concern. With the aim of clarifying this point, recognizing the dominance of Nero and the Roman Empire in interpretations of Revelation 13, this overview takes a look at attenuating features of the Roman application.

While Nero and the Roman Empire still dominate the interpretation of Revelation 13,² this model is not the oldest interpretation or the only one known.³

¹ A well-preserved statue in the Museum of Ancient History in Istanbul is a case in point, featuring the emperor Hadrian (117-138) in a striking pose, his right foot planted on the head of a prostrate and thoroughly vanquished subject. Even the festive wrapping of the imperial cult, presumably the 'kinder, gentler' face of the imperial combination of statecraft and religion, conveyed a crude delight in violence. S. R. F. Price (*Rituals and Power: The Roman imperial cult in Asia Minor* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984], 89) points out that bloody combats in the form of gladiatorial games and animal fights became a popular part of the cult. Although these games were a peripheral addition to the traditional Greek cult ritual in Asia Minor, they were strongly Roman and unabashedly violent.

² To Bousset (*Offenbarung*, 120), "the observation that the core of the prophecy in the Apocalypse refers to the then widely held expectation of Nero *redivivus* is in my opinion an immovable point that will not again be surrendered, the *rocher de bronze* of the contemporary historical

Challenges to the contemporary historical view have been voiced with considerable persuasiveness,⁴ so much so that defenders of what must be seen as the most widely held interpretation have begun to wonder aloud about its continued viability.⁵ The imperial view holds that the beast from the sea is the Roman Empire, particularly in its manifestation under the emperor Nero and in the myth of Nero's return after his suicide (13:1-10).⁶ The lamb-like beast from the earth is thought to represent the imperial cult (13:11-17),⁷ and the mysterious number 666 is assumed to clinch the role of Nero because, rightly deciphered in Hebrew lettering, 666 means *Neron kaisar* (13:18).⁸

interpretation against which all contrary points of view so far have been dashed to pieces" (translation mine). This view is maintained with minor variations, though with less rhetorical flourish, by a host of interpreters; cf. Swete, *Apocalypse*, 163f.; Beckwith, *Apocalypse*, 635ff.; Charles, *Revelation*, I, 332-3; Caird, *Revelation*, 164; Roloff, *Revelation*, 153-68; Garrow, *Revelation*, 118-25; Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 384-452; Yarbrough Collins, *Combat Myth*, 176-84; Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 729.

³ Gerhard Maier (*Die Johannesoffenbarung und die Kirche* [WUNT 25; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1981], 1, 41-4) begins his history of the interpretation of Revelation with fragments of the writings of Papias, preserved by Irenaeus and Eusebius, of which Irenaeus' work is the oldest (*Against Heresies* V.33.3). While Irenaeus' indebtedness to Papias is acknowledged and is not in doubt (*Against Heresies* V.33.4), Maier presents evidence that Papias' reputation as a chiliast is exaggerated and one-sided. Most important, however, is that Nero and the Roman Empire are conspicuously absent in these early interpretations (cf. especially *Against Heresies* V.25.1-30.4). Swete (*Apocalypse*, 164) finds the earliest mention of the Nero legend in connection with Revelation in the Latin commentary of Victorinus of Pettau, who died a martyr during Diocletian's great persecution. Nero is unequivocally the historical referent for the wounded head in Rev 13:3 in the latest reconstruction of Victorinus' commentary, cf. *Victorin de Poetovio sur l'Apocalypse* (trans. M. Dulaey; Sources chrétiennes 423; Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1997), 106-7. Nevertheless, caveats remain with respect to the recensions and the authenticity of Victorinus' commentary, notably a host of later interpolations attributed to Jerome, as shown by Johannes Haussleiter ("Die Kommentare des Victorinus, Tichonius und Hieronymus zur Apokalypse," *ZKWL* 7 [1886], 239-57).

⁴ Among scholars who take issue with the 'Roman' view are Lohmeyer, *Offenbarung*, 110-19; Paul S. Minear, "The Wounded Beast," *JBL* 72 (1953), 93-101; idem., *I Saw a New Earth*, 118-19; Lenski, *Revelation*, 388-417; Rissi, *Time and History*, 65-70; Mounce, *Revelation*, 253-65; Resseguie, *Revelation Unsealed*, 56-57; Barr, *Tales of the End*, 102-28; Beale, *Revelation*, 686-91; Rick van de Water, "Reconsidering the Beast from the Sea," *NTS* 46 (2000), 245-261. Sweet (*Revelation*, 207-8) concedes a certain legitimacy to the contemporary historical view but feels obliged to ask the question, "But is not this too trivial?"

⁵ Hans-Josef Klauck, "Do They Never Come Back? *Nero Redivivus* and the Apocalypse of John," *CBQ* 63 (2001), 683-698. The author, reviewing the traditional arguments in favour of the *Nero redivivus* hypothesis, lays his expressed concern to rest by predicting a healthy future for this interpretation.

⁶ Cf. Bousset, *Offenbarung*, 360-62. Barclay ("Great Themes of the New Testament," 260-64) has a representative and easily accessible presentation of this view.

⁷ Cf. Bousset, *Offenbarung*, 365-66. Notable historical studies with respect to the scaffolding of this view are Lily Ross Taylor, "The Asiarchs," in *The Beginnings of Christianity*, vol V (eds. Kirsopp

A number of serious studies attenuate this view and call its adequacy into doubt, exemplified by Gerhard Maier's comprehensive review of the history of the interpretation of Revelation.⁹ Only a very limited critique can be attempted here, and the issues to be considered in the present context deal only with Revelation 13 and with concerns deemed relevant to the understanding of ἡ πίστις Ἰησοῦ. Among these concerns are (1) textual evaluations that are prejudicial to the theme of cosmic conflict; (2) the absence of Nero in the earliest known interpretations of Revelation; (3) the impact of the symbolic world of the first half of Revelation on the second half of the book; (4) the priority and ramifications of Revelation's own terms; (5) the relationship of Revelation 13 to the Synoptic Apocalypse; (6) and the slaughtered Lamb as the revealer of the divine character and government.

Textual Features

Three important statements have been singled out on the assumption that they are redactional elements, thereby denigrating the theme of cosmic conflict in Revelation 13.¹⁰ John makes the transition to the vision of this chapter by noting that "[the dragon] took his stand on the sand of the seashore" (12:18). As the beast from the sea enters the

Lake and Henry J. Cadbury; London: Macmillan and Co., 1933), 256-62); Price, *Rituals and Power*; idem., "Between Man and God: Sacrifice in the Roman Imperial Cult," *JRS* 70 (1980), 28-43; idem., "God and the Emperors: The Greek Language of the Roman Imperial Cult," *JHS* 104 (1984), 79-95; G. H. R. Horsley, "The Inscriptions of Ephesos and the New Testament," *NovT* 34 (1992), 105-68; J. Nelson Kraybill, *Imperial Cult and Commerce in John's Apocalypse* (JSNT Sup 132; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996).

⁸ Bauckham (*Climax of Prophecy*, 389) admits of no ambiguity on this point: "The gematria does not merely assert that Nero is the beast: it demonstrates that he is."

⁹ Maier (*Johannesoffenbarung*, 622) concludes that "the contemporary historical (*zeitgeschichtliche*) interpretation has not brought more to the explication of the Apocalypse than to make available some background material from the time of its composition." In direct contradiction of Bousset he asserts that "the [myth of] 'Nero redivivus' is anything but a *rocher de bronze* for interpretation; it is only a hypothesis, and a fairly clumsy one at that" (translation mine). The present study finds itself in broad agreement with Maier's conclusions (pp. 619-24).

¹⁰ Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 725-26; cf. also Charles, *Revelation*, I, 358.

picture, saturated with allusions to Daniel's vision of the four world empires (Dan 7:1-7), the text states that "*the dragon* gave it his power and his throne and great authority" (13:2b). The surrogate function of the beast from the sea is evident in the disclosure that people's fascination with the designated stand-in actually reflects devotion to the power that stands behind it. "They worshiped *the dragon*, for he had given his authority to the beast" (13:4a). Again, when the second beast emerges from the earth, the role of the dragon persists in the foreground. Revelation says of this beast that "it had two horns like a lamb and it spoke *like a dragon*" (13:11). Beginning with the introductory verse picturing the dragon on the seashore (12:18), this sequence has four references to the role of the dragon (12:18; 13:2b; 13:4a; 13:11b), all of which indicate that the dragon is a leading character in the unfolding drama and that the theme of cosmic conflict remains the main determinant of the plot.¹¹

Needless to say, the parameters for the narrative are significantly altered by the supposition that all the references to the dragon in this sequence are redactional,¹² with the implication that they are subservient elements and may be dispensable with respect to the plot in Revelation 13. In addition to being wholly gratuitous in the light of the textual evidence, the assertion that "the dragon was not originally part of the two visions in 13:1-10 and 13:11-18" prejudices the theme of cosmic conflict in this section,¹³ inviting the historical foreground of the Roman Empire to eclipse the biblical narrative in terms of deciding the subtext of the plot.¹⁴

¹¹ Aune (*Revelation 6-16*, 725-26) notes that there are eight references to the dragon in Rev 12:1-17. His claim that each mention of the dragon in Rev 13 is redactional sets up a contrast between chapter 12 and chapter 13 that fails to convince. By qualitative as much as by quantitative criteria the dragon assumes undiminished significance in Revelation 13.

¹² Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 725-26.

¹³ Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 725-26.

¹⁴ When the binding and release of Satan in Revelation 20 force the interpreter to deal with him as a character in his own right, the bafflement of interpreters merely computes the consequences of

A similar weakening of the cosmic conflict theme results from construals of the *edóthe* language in Revelation 13. John says of the beast rising from the sea that “it *was allowed to* make war on the saints and to conquer them” and that “it *was given* authority over every tribe and people and language and nation” (13:7). Here the dynamic translation of the NRSV obscures the repeated and carefully paired wording that on the one hand describes the activity of this power and on the other hand circumscribes the sphere of its operation. In the instances that are italicized above the important word *edóthe* appears (13:7).

καὶ ἐδόθη αὐτῷ ποιῆσαι πόλεμον μετὰ τῶν ἁγίων

καὶ ἐδόθη αὐτῷ ἐξουσία ἐπὶ πᾶσαν φυλὴν καὶ λαὸν καὶ γλῶσσαν καὶ ἔθνος

This language recalls the four horsemen (6:1-8), whose activity is also described in terms of *edóthe*, and the context of the cosmic conflict calls for a reading of *edóthe* that is more nuanced than a simple and univalent circumlocution of divine activity.¹⁵ Significantly, the breaking of the seals in the first half of Revelation and the activity of the beasts in the second half employ the same mode of speech, conveying thematic continuity and an indistinguishable point of view. In the case of the beast rising from the sea, it is decidedly not God who makes “war on the saints” (13:7) because such a reading makes mockery of the conflict in which the parties are embroiled. It is the opposing side that thus afflicts the believers at the instigation of the one who set off the war in heaven (12:7), and in this context *edóthe* denotes the freedom that is granted to the opposing side.¹⁶ Indeed, and in yet another reminiscence of the horsemen in the seal

failing to take his character seriously throughout the book. Since interpretations have banished him to an inferior role in the narrative, if not excised him altogether, there is little that can be brought to the unexpected complexity of Satan’s final demise.

¹⁵ Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 743.

¹⁶ Cf. Black, “Greek Words with ‘Hebrew’ Meanings,” 145-46; Thompson, *Apocalypse and Semitic Syntax*, 14.

cycle, the power in view is “allowed to make war on the saints *and to conquer them*” (καὶ νικῆσαι αὐτούς), recalling the first horseman who rides forth “conquering and to conquer” (νικῶν καὶ ἵνα νικήσῃ, 6:2).¹⁷

The activity of the beast from the earth is likewise portrayed in the *edóthe* language that dominates descriptions of the opposing side throughout Revelation. This beast deceives those who dwell on the earth διὰ τὰ σημεῖα ἃ ἐδόθη αὐτῷ ποιῆσαι (13:14). In fact, the beast appears to take the art of deception to an unprecedented level because ἐδόθη αὐτῷ δοῦναι πνεῦμα τῇ εἰκόνι τοῦ θηρίου, ἵνα καὶ λαλήσῃ ἡ εἰκὼν τοῦ θηρίου (13:15). Reading this as mere circumlocution of divine activity plays down the reality of the opposing side, and, more seriously, robs the opposing side of intentionality.¹⁸ Moreover, this view dilutes the most significant explanatory element in the narrative, the reality of the cosmic conflict, and the problem becomes particularly acute when the allusive horizon of the Old Testament also recedes into the background.

It is therefore warranted to ask whether the beast from the earth really finds its true fulfilment in the imperial cult, as several interpreters argue in detail.¹⁹ Are the σημεῖα μεγάλα attributed to its activity merely examples of well known “staged cultic wonders” in the form of moving statues and “lightning and amazing fire signs”?²⁰ Is it plausible that the historical sources documenting the gadgetry of the cult ceremonial, themselves never in doubt that it represented trickery, in this respect exceed John, who

¹⁷ If the ἵνα phrase describing the activity of the first rider is given an intentional force rather than merely read as an infinitive, the expression might be translated “conquering and with the intention to win.”

¹⁸ Barr (*Tales of the End*, 102), sensitive to the narrative parameters, notes that “one of the most shocking things about this third story is that God is no longer the main actor. The dragon acts and God reacts. ...the only active verbs are those connected with the dragon. This is the dragon’s story.”

¹⁹ Steven J. Scherrer, “Signs and Wonders in the Imperial Cult: A New Look at A Roman Religious Institution in the Light of Rev 13:13-15,” *JBL* 103 (1984), 599-610; Price, *Rituals and Power*, 197; Kraybill, *Imperial Cult and Commerce*, 26.

²⁰ Scherrer, “Signs and Wonders,” 600-601.

thought that it was real?²¹ Does John, whose overriding concern is to help the reader distinguish the true from the false, actually prove himself inferior to the pagan sources describing the same phenomena by falling victim not only to one but to two superstitions? Unlike Lucian, who does not believe in Satan and who understands that the signs and wonders of the cult are produced by means of mechanical manipulation, John naïvely holds to the false notion that the signs are real and that a supernatural agent is at work.²²

The textual features identified above not only argue in favour of keeping the theme of cosmic conflict resolutely in the foreground throughout this section. The text also clings tenaciously to the Old Testament as the source of its imagery, a possibility that proponents of the 'Roman' view has had to grant,²³ and it seems to seek a referent that is more subtle than Nero and far more sophisticated than the contrivances of the imperial cult.

Early History of Interpretation of Revelation 13

The early history of the interpretation of Revelation contributes yet another reason to question whether the myth of Nero's return is a sufficient background element for the imagery in Revelation 13. In the first known reference to Revelation rising to the level of an interpretation, the myth of Nero's return is absent. This is all the more remarkable

²¹ Scherrer ("Signs and Wonders," 601-602), with Lucian as his source, describes a 'talking' god, the miracle made possible by connecting cranes' windpipes together and passing them through the head of the statue, the voice supplied from outside. The difference between Lucian and Revelation, notes Scherrer, "is that Lucian rationalized his account, telling us it was all mere trickery, whereas John apparently believes that the wonders are real but that Satan is behind them."

²² Scherrer ("Signs and Wonders," 602) assumes a high degree of naïveté on the part of John and his fellow believers, adding a telling exclamation mark on this particular point. "We see in such texts that there seems to have been a general readiness on the part of many people to believe that certain statues under certain conditions could speak!"

²³ Scherrer, "Signs and Wonders," 600, 604.

because the reference is attributable to a well-placed source, Irenaeus of Lyons, and because Irenaeus is preoccupied by what modern interpreters believe is a coded phrase for Nero's name, the number 666 (13:18).²⁴ Even though little is known about him, Irenaeus has the essential biographical prerequisites to be a valued source of information for the view that reads Revelation as an allegory referring to Nero. Irenaeus established his reputation as the bishop of Lyons, but his birth place was Smyrna, one of the seven cities of Revelation.²⁵ It is likely that he was born no later than 140 A.D.,²⁶ not remote in time from the historical setting of Revelation and early enough for him to make the claim that Revelation "was seen not long ago but nearly in our generation, toward the end of the reign of Domitian."²⁷ According to Eusebius, Irenaeus had seen Polycarp in person as a young man,²⁸ and his commitment to the defence of orthodox doctrine is an additional reason to regard him as a significant source.

But the myth of Nero's return is absent from Irenaeus' horizon. It does not occur to him that Nero at least ought to be one of the options for the meaning of the number 666 when he tests several suggestions of his own.²⁹ Beale rightly makes this omission one of his main arguments for questioning the Nero hypothesis, pointing out that "such a lack of consideration is striking since Nero's infamous reputation as a

²⁴ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* V.30.1.

²⁵ Robert M. Grant, *Irenaeus of Lyons (The Early Church Fathers)*, London: Routledge, 1997), 2.

²⁶ Frend (*Rise of Christianity*, 244) suggests 130-200 AD as the best approximation for Irenaeus' lifetime.

²⁷ *Against Heresies* V.30.3.

²⁸ Grant, *Irenaeus of Lyons*, 2.

²⁹ *Against Heresies* V.30.3.

persecuting tyrant would still have been well known.”³⁰ The reality and long-lasting viability of the myth of Nero’s return is well attested in the *Sibylline Oracles*,³¹ billed as “the missing link” and the bridge to the alleged appearance of the myth in Revelation.³² If Book 5 of the *Sibylline Oracles* dates to the reign of Hadrian (117-138) and Book 8 to the reign of Marcus Aurelius (161-180),³³ the references to the myth of Nero’s return in these oracles demonstrate that it was still exercising minds well into the lifetime of Irenaeus.

Irenaeus’ ignorance with respect to Nero and the myth of his return means that the one living closest to the historical realities said to be depicted in Revelation cannot discern what those standing far away claim to see with perfect clarity. From the point of view of later interpretations Irenaeus’ shortcomings on this point makes the Nero hypothesis a particularly daring example of what Kermode with a touch of self-deprecating irony calls “the interpretative inadequacy of our predecessors.”³⁴ In the eyes of posterity Irenaeus’ shortcoming must be that he did not understand and not that he forgot, although it also means that he failed to grasp the interpretation that believers

³⁰ Beale, *Revelation*, 20. Beale offers a number of additional reasons for questioning the identification with Nero (*Revelation*, 719-21). Lohmeyer (*Offenbarung*, 119) sets the number 666 against an eschatological horizon. Lenski (*Revelation*, 411-17) sees it as a *human number* symbolic of fatally defective qualities. Minear (*I Saw a New Earth*, 123) warns that many interpretations of the number 666 have a limiting and distorting effect. Mounce (*Revelation*, 264-65) is skeptical of a solution that “asks us to calculate a Hebrew transliteration of the Greek form of a Latin name, and that with a defective spelling.” Rowland (*Revelation*, 114) is equivocal as to its meaning and importance, and Resseguie (*Revelation Unsealed*, 56) argues that Nero falls short of Revelation’s plot and symbolism. To Barr (*Tales of the End*, 128) the number signifies something that is “incomplete and imperfect.”

³¹ *Sibylline Oracles*, trans. John J. Collins, in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (ed. James H. Charlesworth, 2 vols.; New York: Doubleday, 1983), I, 317-472. The most relevant passages are 4:119-124.137-139; 5:28-34.93-110.137-161.214-228.361-380; 8:40-74.139-159; 12:78-93.

³² Klauck, “*Nero Redivivus*,” 683-98.

³³ Larry Kreitzer, “Hadrian and the *Nero Redivivus* Myth,” *ZNW* 79 (1988), 92-115. Significantly, Book 8:65-74 predicts the return of Nero during the reign of Marcus Aurelius, who died in A.D. 180 (cf. Collins, *Sibylline Oracles*, 416).

³⁴ Kermode, *Genesis of Secrecy*, 17.

living in his native territory of Asia Minor one generation earlier had taken for granted.³⁵

To Irenaeus the horizon of Revelation and the number 666 does not lie in the past but in the future. He has little confidence in those who immerse themselves in the subject, certain of their calculations, “and define the name they find as that of *him who is to come*.”³⁶ When Irenaeus proposes that “the name Titan has enough persuasiveness and probability for us to conclude out of many names that it could well be *the man who is to come*,”³⁷ he is as tentative in his confidence as he is careful to refer to a future yet unknown. “And another danger, no slight one, will ensue for those who have falsely imagined they know the name of the Antichrist,” Irenaeus warns, “if they posit one name and he comes up with another, they will be easily seduced by him, as if the one they should fear were not yet present.”³⁸ Aside from the fact that the myth of Nero’s return seems to be absent from Irenaeus’ interpretative options, his caution to interpreters has virtually fallen on deaf ears.

The Influence of the First Half of Revelation

The first half of Revelation sets thematic parameters that make it possible to attribute Irenaeus’ view to something other than amnesia, ignorance, or the “interpretative inadequacy” of an ancient source. As emphasized in the previous chapter, the crisis addressed in the heavenly council in Revelation (5:1-4) introduces a plot that is

³⁵ To Kermode (*Genesis of Secrecy*, 17), “[w]e shall become accustomed to the notion that the first person to misunderstand the content of Mark was the man who wrote it; and that eighteen centuries of interpretation intervened between the first writing down of the parables and the advent of interpreters who knew how to read them.” Irenaeus’ alleged failure with respect to Nero and the number 666 suggests an analogous situation.

³⁶ *Against Heresies* V.30.1; translation from Grant, *Irenaeus of Lyons*, 176-77.

³⁷ *Against Heresies* V.30.3.

³⁸ *Against Heresies* V.30.1; translation from Grant, *Irenaeus of Lyons*, 176-77.

conceived in primordial and cosmic terms, and this plot does not lead effortlessly to the myth of Nero's return. In this respect Irenaeus' reading transmits on the same wavelength as that of the modern narrative reader. Both allow the text to exert a controlling influence on interpretation, and both perceive a story line and a plot that aim to portray the conflict between good and evil in ultimate terms. Neither Irenaeus nor the critical narrative reader finds the historical realities of the Roman Empire or the myth of Nero's return to be a sufficient match for the symbolic world of Revelation. In the view of these readers the definitive horizon of Revelation's vision lies beyond the contemporary historical scene because the expectation created by the text does not find enough in the contemporary situation to reflect adequately the parameters set by the textual narrative. It is on the strength of the textual trajectory and its expectation that the narrative reader asks the damning question, "In what way is Nero the consummate opponent of Christ?"³⁹

The question posed in the heavenly council (5:2) and the tears of the Seer (5:4) in the first half of Revelation represent an instance of introspection that breaks the apocalyptic stereotype: It is a scene that has 'background.'⁴⁰ Yarbrow Collins captures the apprehension when she writes that "the first four verses of chapter 5 imply that the heavenly council is faced with a serious problem."⁴¹ But the meaning of this scene does not lie fully exposed in the foreground or on the surface of the text, and the speech to which the reader is privy is not only a vehicle to externalize thoughts. As in Auerbach's keen reading of the Genesis account of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac, here, too, speech

³⁹ Resseguie, *Revelation Unsealed*, 56.

⁴⁰ 'Background' must be understood figuratively along the lines of Auerbach's reading of biblical narrative, referring to elements of depth that loom large in the narrative but are not expressed (cf. Auerbach, *Mimesis*, 7-12).

⁴¹ Yarbrow Collins, *Apocalypse*, 39.

“serves to indicate thoughts which remain unexpressed.”⁴² The search for an earthly corollary to the heavenly scene remains elusive. Specifically, the claims of the Roman Empire and the myth of Nero’s return do not rise to the level of the concern that is addressed before the heavenly council in the first half of Revelation.

On the contrary, the scene in the heavenly council appears ‘self-contained’ and reflective of a concern known to itself and its immediate participants. This does not mean that it has no relation to history, but it signifies that what transpires in the heavenly council transcends the concern of the moment. The determinant of the narrative does not arise only in the concrete historical situation contemporary to John, framing a plot conceived in terms of the earthly situation. Even if ‘background’ is reduced to questions of historical and biographical detail and not, as in Auerbach’s use of the term, to thoughts and sentiments that remain unexpressed, the Roman Empire does not provide sufficient historical ‘background’ to elicit a tremor large enough to cause the kind of alarm that is evident in the heavenly council. Instead, as argued in this thesis, the issue before the heavenly council is grounded in a background that begins with the war in heaven, in the biography of “the Shining One,” in the bewitching nature of the programme of the fallen opponent, and, above all, in the means adopted to make right what went wrong (5:6).

Little is left of the influence of the scene in the heavenly council when the myth of Nero’s return achieves the status of the climactic event in the cosmic conflict (13:3), or when the beast that looked like a lamb but spoke like a dragon is held to be the imperial cult (13:11). While this application is questionable on the terms of the symbols said to represent these candidates, it tends to trivialize the plot suggested by the scene in the heavenly council and to attenuate its own immediate grounding in the

⁴² Auerbach, *Mimesis*, 9.

theme of cosmic conflict in Revelation 12 (12:7-9).⁴³ If the head that “seemed to have received a death-blow, but its mortal wound had been healed” (13:3) reflects the myth of Nero’s return, it takes as its fulfilment a phenomenon that can only relate to its counterpoint – the Lamb that looked “as if it had been slaughtered” (5:6) – on the level of parody.⁴⁴ This application pre-emptes the possibility that the adversary in the cosmic conflict wages war not only by appearing as a parody of the truth but also by aiming to appropriate the hallmarks of Christ and produce a compelling counterfeit to “the faithful and true witness” of Jesus (3:14). In fact, the role attributed to the myth of Nero’s return sets a standard for what the opponent in the cosmic conflict is capable of doing that falls short of the opponent’s actual capacity. Revelation is reduced to a caricature of its own message if interpretations stop short of envisioning fulfilment that is capable of appropriating the external ramifications of the death and resurrection of Jesus as constituent elements of itself.⁴⁵ Irenaeus’ early reading derives from the latter perception and must be appreciated in this light. His outlook attributes ‘background’ to the subject matter at hand, exemplifying a cautious approach to the symbols of Revelation. These symbols deserve a closer look on their own terms.

⁴³ Thus the question posed by Swete (*Revelation*, 207-8), “But is not this too trivial?”

⁴⁴ Cf. Caird, *Revelation*, 164; Roloff, *Revelation*, 155; Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 451.

⁴⁵ History will not be at a loss to find examples where constellations of power pose not as a parody of Christ but as his committed representatives. Michael Sells (*The Bridge Betrayed. Religion and Genocide in Bosnia* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996], 81-82) documents the role of the Orthodox Church as a source of inspiration to those who carried out the genocide in Bosnia. On Orthodox Easter, 1993, Metropolitan Nikolaj, the highest-ranking Serb Orthodox Church official in Bosnia spoke glowingly of the leadership of Radovan Karadzic and General Ratko Mladic as an example of “following the hard road of Christ.” Bauckham (*Revelation*, 44), conscious of the risk of reading Revelation merely as parody and wishing to extend the message beyond the application he takes as primary, sees it as “one of the deepest ironies of Christian history that, when the Roman Empire became nominally Christian under the power of the Christian emperors, Christianity came to function not so very differently from the state religion which Revelation portrays as Rome’s idolatrous self-deification.”

The Priority of Revelation's Own Terms

The terms that most deserve to be examined relate to the description of the two beasts called upon to promote the dragon's programme. Revelation says of the beast rising out of the sea that "one of its heads seemed to have received a death-blow, but its mortal wound had been healed" (13:3). The healing makes for stunning public relations; "in amazement the whole earth followed the beast" (13:3). Even though this verse is probably the strongest piece of evidence to those who see the myth of Nero's return in Revelation, it has a number of features that call the Nero interpretation into question.

First, the language used to describe the mortal wound of the beast is identical to the most revealing and forceful portrayal of Jesus in all of Revelation. Just as Jesus appears as ἀρνίον... ὡς ἐσφαγμένον (5:6), one of the heads of the beast is represented ὡς ἐσφαγμένην εἰς θάνατον (13:3). To Rissi, this parallel is best appreciated "in the context of the 'imitation motifs' within the Antichrist theme" rather than as a parody of Nero's suicide.⁴⁶ While this view may not be self-evident, it puts forward an alternative possibility, and it leaves a question mark on an interpretation whose main merit, one suspects, is that the interpreter is supposed to know *a priori* that the subject is Nero. Second, *sphazein* is hardly the term one would use to describe a self-inflicted wound or a suicide because the word specifically connotes violence inflicted from without. Rissi, again, sees in this expression a term that "simply forbids thinking of Nero's suicide, but rather a blow from an enemy's hand."⁴⁷ Third, the fact that this beast repeatedly is referred to "as slain" points to a crucial constituent of its identity.⁴⁸ Just as the identity

⁴⁶ Rissi, *Time and History*, 66.

⁴⁷ Rissi, *Time and History*, 66.

⁴⁸ Three times the reader is reminded of the fatal wound (13:3, 12, 14). Minear ("The Wounded Beast," 96) notes that although the wound is first assigned to one of the heads of the beast, a limitation that makes the Nero application more plausible, "it is later assigned twice to the beast itself (13:12, 14),"

of the Lamb is inseparably linked to the fact of being slain (5:6, 9, 12; 13:8), so it is with the character of the beast from the sea (13:3, 12, 14). Fourth, even more than the *wound* is a constituent of the identity of the beast, it is the *healing* of the wound that is the source of the beast's amazing resurgence.

καὶ ἡ πληγὴ τοῦ θανάτου αὐτοῦ ἐθεραπεύθη (13:3)

οὗ ἐθεραπεύθη ἡ πληγὴ τοῦ θανάτου αὐτοῦ (13:12)

ὃς ἔχει τὴν πληγὴν τῆς μαχαίρης καὶ ἔζησεν (13:14)

As Minear points out, the emphasis on the impact of the healing of the wound makes the Nero hypothesis particularly vulnerable (13:3).

Now there is little evidence that the rumored resuscitation of Nero actually had any such effects. It did not induce either Roman citizens or Christians "to follow the beast with wonder." It did not enhance the seductive worship of the dragon, nor did it aid the dragon in his deadly war against the saints. In fact, the legend of Nero's pending return from Parthia was considered a threat to the empire and the line of emperors. If we are to understand the wounded head, therefore, we should look not so much for an emperor who died a violent death, but for an event in which the authority of the beast (and the dragon) was both destroyed and deceptively restored.⁴⁹

The emergence of the second beast (13:11) raises additional problems with respect to the myth of Nero's return. If the first beast encroaches on the death and resurrection of the Lamb, the second beast, having "two horns like a lamb" (13:11), appropriates the most favoured designation of Jesus in Revelation, ἀρνίον.⁵⁰ This appropriation suggests that the lamb-like beast carries out its subversion under cover of the connotation of this term and not merely as its caricature.⁵¹ Aune is certainly correct

a more difficult proposition for the Nero hypothesis. Beale (*Revelation*, 689) shows that like Christ's death and resurrection the beast's recovery does not "nullify the very real deathblow."

⁴⁹ Minear, "The Wounded Beast," 97.

⁵⁰ Holtz, *Die Christologie der Apokalypse*, 39. ἀρνίον refers to Jesus twenty-eight times in Revelation and is used once to designate the third member of the subversive triumvirate (13:11); cf. also Johns, "The Lamb in the Rhetorical Program of the Apocalypse of John," 770.

⁵¹ Bousset (*Offenbarung*, 366) sounds less than persuasive when suggesting that John "an das Festland Kleinasiens gedacht haben," assuming this geographical location to be the best explanation for

that “this second beast is completely subservient to the first beast, all of the activities of the former are performed in the service of the latter; therefore, the first beast also dominates vv 12-18.”⁵² This subservience is not only to the first beast as such, meaning the Roman Empire, but to “the first beast, *whose mortal wound had been healed*” (13:12), meaning the imperial office upon the projected return of Nero. Again, the second beast is not only concerned to make an image to the first beast as such, meaning the Roman Empire, but “an image for the beast that had been wounded by the sword *and yet lived*” (13:14), meaning the Roman Empire or the imperial office after Nero’s sensational return. If Nero is the quintessential historical referent for the first beast, Revelation’s description of the function of the second beast makes the beast from the earth entirely subservient to the myth of Nero’s return. And if the second beast represents the imperial cult, in itself a tenuous proposition, the care taken by Revelation to describe the relationship between the second beast and “the first beast, *whose mortal wound had been healed*” (13:12), strains the limit of what the historical projection of this power is able to generate.

An important characteristic of the beast coming from the earth touches on the issue that lies at the heart of the cosmic conflict to further devalue the myth of Nero’s return. John says that the beast from the earth “had two horns like a lamb and *it spoke like a dragon*” (13:11). As noted previously, whether viewed in purely creaturely terms or perceived on the terms of the biblical narrative, the dragon is identical with the serpent (12:9; 20:2), and it is justifiable to read that the lamb-like beast “spoke *like the*

the fact that the beast arises “from the earth.” Aune (*Revelation 6-16*, 757) admits that “the identity of the beast from the earth is problematic,” and he points out discrepancies between the description of the lamb-like beast in Revelation and the purported fulfilment in the imperial cult.

⁵² Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 779.

serpent.”⁵³ In the Genesis account of the fall, the serpent is dangerous because of what it says; its power to deceive is entirely dependent on speech (Gen 3:1-6). Revelation’s view of the serpent echoes and amplifies this characteristic, validating the contention that the foremost weapon of the opposing side in the cosmic conflict relates to what is said.

Speech is not an accidental attribute of the lamb-like beast in Revelation (13:11b). Indeed, the ability to speak and the content of its speech seem to be essential and defining characteristics and the reason why the second beast is also called “the false prophet” (16:13; 19:20; 20:10).⁵⁴ This quality on the part of the beast from the earth exemplifies and affirms that speech on the part of the opposing side is an important theme in Revelation.

The trumpet sequence in the first half of Revelation features this theme allusively in connection with the eschatological battle under the sixth trumpet. For all their frightening appearance the power of the horses ultimately belongs in the category of speech. “For the power of the horses is *in their mouths and in their tails*; their tails are like serpents, *having heads; and with them they inflict harm*” (9:19). In the maze of bizarre imagery describing demonic activity at its zenith, the author is straining to achieve a degree of precision with respect to the character of the opposing side. The visual impact of his imagery is so overwhelming that it threatens to eclipse the subtle auditory implication. Nevertheless, when the hyperbole of the representation is reduced to its material essence, it leaves the interpreter to ponder the faculty of speech that is implied by these symbols. Likewise, in the primordial glimpse of the cosmic conflict, allowing the juxtaposition of mouth and tail to persist even where it is not explicitly

⁵³ Barclay, *Revelation*, II, 98.

⁵⁴ Rissi, *Time and History*, 67.

stated, the downfall of the angels is brought about by the dragon's tail; "his tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth" (12:4). These depictions are preparatory for an increasingly explicit focus on the faculty of speech, indicating that speech must not be seen as aberrant or subordinate to features that are taken to better represent the demonic in Revelation.

The beast from the sea shares in the attributes of the dragon and is featured as the dragon's mirror image.⁵⁵ Like the dragon the beast from the sea has seven heads and ten horns (12:3; 13:1), and the scarlet colour of the beast mirrors the red colour of the dragon (12:3; 17:3). What is said to be a characteristic of the beast from the sea, however, must also be seen as a trait of the dragon, an attribute of "the Shining One" in his fallen state. The relationship is reciprocal even for characteristics that are not explicitly delineated with respect to one or the other. For this reason the mouth and the faculty of speech that stand out in the description of the beast from the sea reflect the character and programme of the dragon. Heinrich Schlier writes observantly that "a significant distinguishing mark of the beast is its mouth,"⁵⁶ and Roloff notes that "the beast's most important organ is his mouth."⁵⁷ This assessment is readily confirmed by the text,

καὶ ἐδόθη αὐτῷ στόμα λαλοῦν μεγάλα καὶ βλασφημίας (13:5)

καὶ ἤνοιξεν τὸ στόμα αὐτοῦ εἰς βλασφημίας πρὸς τὸν θεὸν βλασφημῆσαι τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ καὶ τὴν σκηνὴν αὐτοῦ, τοὺς ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ σκηνοῦντας (13:6)

Assuming that the blasphemous character of the speech represents the illegitimate claims of the Roman Empire in general and the aspirations of the revived

⁵⁵ Roloff (*Revelation*, 156) writes that the beast "that rises from the deep is, to a certain extent, the dragon's mirror image."

⁵⁶ Heinrich Schlier, "Vom Antichrist: Zum 13. Kapitel der Offenbarung Johannis," in *Theologische Aufsätze. Karl Barth zum 50. Geburtstag* (München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1936), 117.

⁵⁷ Roloff, *Revelation*, 157.

Nero in particular, Roloff asserts that “the blasphemous aspect of these speeches lies not in the direct slander of God but in the actual pretension of putting itself in God’s place.”⁵⁸ This commonly held view is reflective of a contracted horizon within which the historical foreground of the Roman Empire overshadows the biblical narrative, eclipsing the full range of the blasphemy that is native to John’s terms.⁵⁹ Instead, and critical to the message of Revelation, the mouth of the beast cannot be seen in isolation from the agency and programme of the dragon. Given that “the dragon gave it his power and his throne and great authority” (13:2), the unrestricted mandate granted to the beast indicates that the latter is commissioned and equipped to fully represent the dragon. This relationship makes the mouth the most important organ of the beast only because it was and is the most important organ of the serpent. What is done by the beast whose “mortal wound was healed” (13:3) becomes revelatory of the opposing side in the cosmic conflict, and the qualitative parameters of the speech have a consistent focus even when it is observed from different angles.

On the semantic level the language describing the speech of the beast has a wider range than what is admitted when the scope is confined to the Roman Empire. There is far-reaching theological content to the speech because the beast blasphemes “his name and his dwelling” (13:6), suggesting an assault on God’s character and government and not only an attempt to arrogate to itself prerogatives belonging to God. When the full range of the meaning of βλασφημία is retained, the implication is to “slander, revile, defame” the other person and “to speak in a disrespectful way that

⁵⁸ Roloff, *Revelation*, 157.

⁵⁹ Schlier (“Antichrist,” 117) maintains, correctly, I believe, that the content of the speech is misrepresentation and malicious talk about God and not merely self-aggrandizement on the part of the sea beast.

demeans, denigrates, maligns” whoever is the subject matter of the speech.⁶⁰ If the relationship between the one “who is called the Devil and Satan” (12:9) and the beast is kept in mind, this does not come as a surprise because the attribute of slandering is the most representative characteristic of the satanic opponent. The two beasts in Revelation 13 are not Satan; they are his surrogates and representatives, but their actions are representative of the character of the concealed commissioner in the same way that the slaughtered Lamb discloses the character of God. What comes out through the speech of the beasts, then, continue along the ideological trajectory established by “the ancient serpent.”

On the intertextual level, the agency of “the ancient serpent” in the cosmic conflict is inseparable from, and depends on, the role of the serpent in the Genesis story of the fall (Gen 3:1-6; Rev 12:9; 20:2). In the Genesis account the entire drama and the fateful outcome revolve around the serpent’s crafty speech, the content of which can only be characterized as misrepresentation and malicious slander. Speech is now seen to be as central to the activity of the beast in the eschatological drama in Revelation as to the serpent in the original alienation between human beings and God in the Garden of Eden.

On the compositional level the speech of the beast from the sea echoes and interacts with one of the most decisive scenes in the cosmic conflict in Revelation.

διὰ τοῦτο εὐφραίνεσθε, [οἱ] οὐρανοὶ καὶ οἱ ἐν αὐτοῖς σκηνοῦντες (12:12)

καὶ ἤνοιξεν τὸ στόμα αὐτοῦ εἰς βλασφημίας πρὸς...τοὺς ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ σκηνοῦντας (13:6)

In the first of these scenes (12:12), the occasion is the joy elicited by the expulsion of Satan, signifying the curtailment of his influence in heaven. In the second

⁶⁰ BDAG, art. βλασφημέω.

scene (13:6), John specifies that the speech of the beast from the sea directly contradicts the outpouring of joy in heaven and the evidence on which the heavenly joy is based. The earthly activity of the beast has a heavenly reality as its point of reference, resonating with a theme internal to the book of Revelation. On the basis of the dragon's commission, the beast from the sea is engaged in a desperate attempt at negating the heavenly point of view, trying to undo the victory of the Lamb and to make it of no consequence. Here, if nowhere else, there is evidence that the songs in Revelation are set in a triangular context and come with a triphonal ring: The voice of proclamation and the voices of acclamation compete with the voice of accusation, the latter coming from the earth to which the fallen opponent is now confined.⁶¹

All three members of the subversive triumvirate are thus endowed with the faculty of speech. For the ancient serpent speech is the means by which he misrepresents God, occasioning the original alienation between God and human beings. The trumpet sequence depicts this feature in qualitative terms; the power of the demonic horde "is in their mouths and in their tails; their tails are like serpents, having heads; and with them they inflict harm" (9:19). In the beast from the sea the mouth is the most distinctive organ, and its aim is made manifest by what it says. The beast from the earth looks like a lamb, but its true character is revealed by the faculty of speech, and it speaks like the serpent. The mortal wound and the resurrection of the sea beast infringe on the most exclusive and hallowed identity marker of the Lamb, and the appearance of the beast from the earth imitates the Lamb. These striking features make the myth of Nero's return and the role of the imperial priesthood seem woefully inadequate for the parameters set by the text,⁶² and they make the message of Revelation point, like

⁶¹ Cf. Jöns, "Proklamation und Akklamation," 187-208.

⁶² Two other textual parameters also point beyond the myth of Nero *redivivus*. Upon the removal of the male child to heaven, John writes that "the woman fled *into the wilderness*" (12:6a). The location

Irenaeus' interpretation, not to the myth of Nero's return but to an expectation more in line with the Synoptic Apocalypse in the Gospels and to the Antichrist motif elsewhere in the New Testament.⁶³

Relationship of Revelation to the Synoptic Apocalypse

It is beyond doubt that there is a 'Synoptic' awareness in Revelation. This applies to a number of scattered statements in Revelation.⁶⁴ Charles shows that the events accompanying the breaking of the seals unfold in the same sequence as the eschatological woes in the Synoptic Gospels, indicating a broad similarity of outlook.⁶⁵ Whether the latter parallels are due to direct dependence of Revelation on the Synoptic

seems significant and is specified twice; the woman "was given the two wings of the great eagle, so that she could fly from the serpent *into the wilderness*" (12:14). The connotation here is clearly to mark the wilderness as a place of refuge. Later, as John is invited to witness the exposé of the great prostitute, he writes that "he carried me away in the spirit into a *wilderness*" (17:3). The wilderness metaphor is now the location of a woman that is pictured as a prostitute. "When I saw her, I was greatly amazed," John writes, better translated, "I was appalled." The wilderness location of the exposé and the stunned reaction of John combine to suggest that he is witness to something that flies in the face of his expectations. Again, as the woman flees from the serpent, "*the earth* came to the help of the woman" (12:16). This role gives *the earth* a positive connotation as an ally or a protector. However, when the third member of the subversive triumvirate emerges, John sees it "coming out of *the earth*" (13:11). This, too, violates what is anticipated, suggesting that the satanic subversion comes from where it is least expected. On both counts the tension and bivalence of these metaphors convey prospects that are not matched by the myth of Nero's return and the role of the imperial cult.

⁶³ The so-called 'Synoptic Apocalypse' is found in Mark 13:1-37; Matt 24:1-51; Luke 21:5-36. The Antichrist theme in 1 John (2:18-26; 4:1-3) and the promised unveiling of "the lawless one" in 2 Thessalonians (2:1-12) espouse ideas that are clearly related to the eschatology of the Synoptic Apocalypse. George R. Beasley-Murray (*Jesus and the Last Days: The Interpretation of the Olivet Discourse* [Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1993]) provides a comprehensive catalogue of the determined and almost incessant attempts to absolve Jesus of responsibility for the eschatological outlook reflected in the Markan rendition of this apocalypse, unsuccessfully, as he interprets the evidence.

⁶⁴ Vos (*Synoptic Traditions*, 54-111) finds direct employment of sayings of Jesus and likely dependence on the Gospels in Rev 1:3a (Luke 11:28); Rev 1:7 (Matt 24:30); Rev 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22 (Mark 4:9, 23; Matt 13:9; Luke 8:8); Rev 3:2-3; 16:15 (Matt 24:42-43; Luke 12:39-40); Rev 3:5c (Matt 10:32; Luke 12:8); Rev 3:20 (Mark 13:29; Matt 24:33); Rev 3:21 (Luke 22:28-30; Matt 19:28); Rev 13:10 (Matt 26:52b).

⁶⁵ Charles, *Revelation*, I, 158-60; cf. also Court, *Myth and History*, 43-53. Even though Charles (*Revelation*, I, 160) first discredits a number of very specific referents contemporary to the author proposed by interpreters prior to him for the events depicted under the seals before suggesting other tentative alternatives of his own, most interpreters have given up finding specific historical applications for the seal sequence altogether.

Gospels, derive from a common apocalyptic tradition,⁶⁶ or stem from “the apocalyptic discourse of Jesus,”⁶⁷ they suggest a shared perspective. These observations increase the likelihood that the “essential consistency of eschatological thought” that has been claimed for the New Testament includes Revelation.⁶⁸

Although not decisive, it is nevertheless of more than passing interest that Jesus in the Gospels seems unconcerned about the Roman Empire.⁶⁹ Moreover, the Synoptic Apocalypse appears to be preoccupied with a threat rising from within the believing community. In Mark the warning to “beware that no one leads you astray” (Mark 13:5; cf. Matt 24:4; Luke 21:8), is followed immediately by the prospect that “many will come *in my name* and say, ‘I am he!’⁷⁰ and they will lead many astray” (Mark 13:6). Whatever the meaning of “in my name,” it suggests a horizon that is not defined by imperial politics in the first century. “False messiahs and false prophets will appear and produce signs and omens, to lead astray, if possible, the elect,” warns the Markan Jesus (Mark 13:22; cf. Matt 24:24). While what is projected in these Synoptic sayings makes use of the same words and phrases that are used in Revelation, indicating a convergent perspective, the trouble it envisions does not relate to an external threat.

The following comparison suggests that the overlap in terminology also may signify conceptual and situational common ground.

⁶⁶ Lohmeyer, *Offenbarung*, 58.

⁶⁷ Vos, *Synoptic Traditions*, 54-111.

⁶⁸ C. E. B. Cranfield, “Thoughts on New Testament Eschatology,” *SJT* 35 (1982), 510.

⁶⁹ van de Water, “Reconsidering the Beast from the Sea,” 246.

⁷⁰ William Lane (*The Gospel of Mark* [NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974], 456-7) observes that the enigmatic Ἐγώ εἰμι, usually translated “I am he” (Mark 13:6) should be “understood to constitute a claim of dignity which finds its significance in God’s own self-designation.”

Revelation

καὶ πλανᾷ τοὺς κατοικοῦντας ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς
(13:14)

καὶ ποιεῖ σημεῖα μεγάλα (13:13)

ἐκ τοῦ στόματος τοῦ ψευδοπροφήτου
(16:13)

Synoptic perspective (Mark 13)

καὶ πολλοὺς πλανήσουσιν v. 6

καὶ δώσουσιν σημεῖα καὶ τέρατα v. 22

ἐγερθήσονται γὰρ ψευδόχριστοι καὶ
ψευδοπροφήται v. 22

According to this comparison Revelation and the Synoptic Apocalypse use virtually identical terminology for their respective eschatological scenarios, envisioning influences that will deceive (πλανᾶω), signs (σημεῖα) that will have a persuasive impact, and a role for a false prophet (ψευδοπροφήτης) either in the singular or in the plural.⁷¹ These verbal and conceptual parallels are complemented by qualitative parameters that align the two eschatological outlooks even more closely. In Mark Jesus takes the signs and wonders of the deceptive influence to be of such a quality as “to lead astray, if possible, the elect” (Mark 13:22; cf. Matt 24:24).⁷² In Revelation the false prophet “performs great signs, even making fire come down from heaven to earth in the sight of all” (13:13). This signifies exceptional and spectacular powers, and the force of this statement is further enhanced by the fact that with respect to Revelation it is an allusion reminiscent of the confrontation between Elijah and the prophets of Baal.⁷³ The two sides in the Old Testament conflict subject the merits of their claims to verification or rejection by a sign, and both agree to abide by the proposition that “the god who answers by fire is indeed God” (1 Kings 18:23-24). Only the God of Elijah is able to

⁷¹ Charles (*Revelation*, I, 342-43) accepts that these terms originally come from the Synoptic Apocalypse and possibly from an even older Jewish apocalypse but that the meaning of the terms are transformed to fit the myth of Nero's return.

⁷² C. E. B. Cranfield (“ST. MARK 13,” *SJT* 6 [1953], 300-1) argues that Jesus' words have a bifocal perspective that cannot be limited to Messianic pretenders prior to the fall of Jerusalem. Likewise, Timothy J. Gedder (*Watchwords: Mark 13 in Markan Eschatology* [JSNT Sup 26; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1989], 235) maintains that the “polysemantic” or bifocal perspective with respect to the end is pervasive and deliberate on the part of the author.

⁷³ Cf. Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 759; Beale, *Revelation*, 709.

perform this feat (1 Kings 18:38), thereby serving to authenticate the credentials of Elijah's cause and ministry. Fire from heaven has real persuasive impact in Revelation, too, but in the meantime the goalposts have been moved. It is not God but the deceiving power that answers by fire in the end-time drama (13:13-14).

Aside from implying means that go infinitely beyond the gadgetry of the imperial cult ceremonial,⁷⁴ the imagery of fire coming down from heaven is apiece with Mark's concern that "the very elect" could be misled by the signs and wonders.⁷⁵ Whether the agents of deception claim the mantle of Jesus as in Mark (Mark 13:5), have the stigmata of the slain Lamb like the beast from the sea (13:3), or looks like a lamb like the beast from the earth (13:11), Revelation and the Synoptic Apocalypse appear to envision a similar level of sophistication to the deceptive influence and an impact that is proportional to its approximation to the genuine. This weakens the supposition that "the false prophet" in Revelation must be understood in terms of a parody, epitomized by the imperial cult. "The delimitation of this second beast with a priestly cult of John's day, whether it be the heathen priesthood or the imperial priesthood of the provinces is too restrictive," concludes Vos.⁷⁶ "At the end Satan's attack must be launched from a beachhead within the Church, where the earth-beast not only carries on priestly activities but displays the credentials of a prophet," writes Minear.⁷⁷ Beale

⁷⁴ Thus Sweet's question (*Revelation*, 214), "But if this *beast* represents propaganda for the emperor cult, how could it be lamb-like enough to deceive Christians?"

⁷⁵ Morna Hooker (*The Gospel according to St Mark* [BNTC; London: A & C Black, 1991], 317) takes the conditional "if it were possible" to imply that "it is possible." This prospect assumes great subtlety as to the character of the deceptive influence.

⁷⁶ Vos, *Synoptic Tradition*, 133.

⁷⁷ Minear, *I Saw a New Earth*, 119.

comes to the almost identical conclusion, stating that “this imagery [Revelation 13] and background suggest deception within the covenant community itself.”⁷⁸

The subtle and persuasive character of the opposing force underlies the accompanying call for discernment on the part of those who are exposed to its stratagems, and this call is heard as much in Revelation as in the Synoptic Apocalypse.⁷⁹ In fact, the call for acute discernment may be the element that unites the end time perspective in the Synoptic Gospels most intimately with that of Revelation, implying that they have the same perception of the opposing power and share the same view of the end. According to Timothy J. Geddert’s analysis of the Markan Apocalypse, the call to look beyond appearances integrates this chapter with the rest of the Gospel of Mark, and it makes discernment the quality by which to prevail in the face of attempts to subvert the truth.⁸⁰ Keen awareness of what is genuine is therefore basic to the believer’s armoury in the Synoptic perspective. Mark concentrates “on the twin and inseparable themes of ‘discernment’ and ‘discipleship’,” says Geddert.⁸¹

Discernment and discipleship are similarly and inextricably linked in Revelation. While this connection is not unique to Revelation,⁸² the discipleship

⁷⁸ Beale, *Revelation*, 708. This possibility is enhanced by the related perspective in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12 where Paul envisions “the falling away” (ἡ ἀποστασία) before the parousia of Jesus; cf. David Wenham, “Paul and the Synoptic Apocalypse,” in *Gospel Perspectives. Studies of History and Tradition in the Four Gospels* (ed. R. T. France and David Wenham; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1981), II:345-75.

⁷⁹ The call for discernment is the watchword to each of the seven churches (Rev 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22) as well as to the situation created by the false trinity described in Revelation 13 (13:9). “Let anyone who has an ear listen,” however, is sounded for similar reasons and with equal intensity in the Synoptic Apocalypse (Mark 4:9, 23; Matt 13:9; Luke 8:8).

⁸⁰ Geddert, *Mark 13*, 59-87. He argues that in Mark the ordinary term βλέπω is “part of a subtle call to ‘see’ what is below the surface of events, discourses and texts” (p 59).

⁸¹ Geddert, *Mark 13*, 257.

⁸² Bruce Longenecker (*2 Esdras* [Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995]) demonstrates a similar connection between apocalyptic disclosure and discipleship in *2 Esdras* [4 Ezra], but the quietism in *2 Esdras* seems predicated on expected retribution and vengeance whereas the believer’s stance in Revelation is to exemplify the character of the divine government.

envisioned in Revelation is distinctive in that it takes the divine character as its pattern. Acquiescence to captivity and death on the part of the disciple has the slaughtered Lamb as its pattern and standard, and this ideal is nowhere more explicit than in the believer's response to the deceptive and coercive ways of the eschatological beasts (13:9-10).⁸³ John holds in common with Mark the conviction that it is only by attention to the means used by the respective claimant that its true character is discerned.⁸⁴ Geddert says of Mark's message that "there must be understanding, and the prerequisite for understanding is faithful discipleship."⁸⁵ For both, however, the reverse is also true: discernment is a prerequisite for authentic and persevering discipleship.

Verbal parallels, conceptual convergence, and the shared emphasis on understanding diminish the utility of the myth of Nero's return and the role of the imperial priesthood in the interpretation of Revelation. These proposed referents for the two beasts in chapter 13 seem as inadequate for the message of Revelation as the Roman Empire is a remote concern in the Synoptic Apocalypse.

The Issue in Revelation 13

The "explicit summons to attention"⁸⁶ in Revelation 13 ties the content of this chapter closely to the value that is singled out as the object of enmity in the cosmic conflict (13:9-10; cf. 12:17; 14:12). When the grounding of these verses in the story line of

⁸³ Cf. Rev 12:17; 13:10; 14:4, 12. Perhaps the connection between discernment and discipleship is best exemplified in the description of believers as those who "follow the Lamb wherever he goes" (14:4).

⁸⁴ In Revelation the beast from the sea has the stigmata of Jesus' death and resurrection but it speaks maliciously about God and makes war against the believers (13:5-7). The wonder-working beast from the earth looks like a lamb but speaks like the serpent and is entirely dedicated to promoting the cause and prestige of the beast from the sea (13:11-15). In Mark Jesus has given his followers the means to discern the true from the false in a context where the false imitates the true (Mark 13:23).

⁸⁵ Geddert, *Mark 13*, 258.

⁸⁶ Lambrecht, "Rev 13,9-10," 333.

Revelation is retained, it pulls the concern of Revelation 13 further from its captivity to the myth of Nero's return to anchor it indissolubly to the theme of cosmic conflict and its contested value. The triple emphasis and dialogical character of the exhortation focus squarely on the means to which the believer must be committed.

(1) Εἴ τις ἔχει οὖς ἀκουσάτω (13:9).

(2) εἴ τις εἰς αἰχμαλωσίαν, εἰς αἰχμαλωσίαν ὑπάγει (13:10ab)
εἴ τις ἐν μαχαίρῃ ἀποκτανθῆναι αὐτὸν ἐν μαχαίρῃ ἀποκτανθῆναι (13:10cd)

(3) Ὡδέ ἐστὶν ἡ ὑπομονὴ καὶ ἡ πίστις τῶν ἁγίων (13:10e)

(1) The passage signals an interruption in the narrative with the narrator directly addressing the audience. It represents a call for discernment, furnishing an example of intent that belongs, in Kermode's phrase, to the category of "aural circumcision."⁸⁷

(2) The second element highlights the value that the believer must accept in order to prevail in the conflict, presented as "a prophetic oracle in the form of a maxim."⁸⁸ Here the existence of textual variants must be frankly acknowledged,⁸⁹ but the arguments in favour of the Nestle-Aland rendition reproduced above are nevertheless compelling,⁹⁰ and the emphasis that goes with this wording fully justifies the call for discernment that precedes it. While the awkward and almost absurdly redundant character of this construction at first sight seems disturbing, it adds force to the message as if to express a constitutional principle. No one has improved materially

⁸⁷ Kermode, *Genesis of Secrecy*, 3.

⁸⁸ Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 730.

⁸⁹ Charles (*Revelation*, I, 355-56) discusses the three most significant alternatives, all three of which relate mainly to whether the best reading of 13:10cd should be εἴ τις ἐν μαχαίρῃ ἀποκτανθῆναι αὐτὸν ἐν μαχαίρῃ ἀποκτανθῆναι, as in Nestle-Aland, or εἴ τις ἐν μαχαίρῃ ἀποκτενεῖ, δεῖ αὐτὸν ἐν μαχαίρῃ ἀποκτανθῆναι, for which there is also significant attestation.

⁹⁰ Charles (*Revelation*, I, 355) is unequivocal that A is the correct reading as reflected in Nestle-Aland. Aune (*Revelation 6-16*, 719, 731) supports Charles' position, as does Beale (*Revelation*, 705-6). Reasons in support of the preferred reading in Nestle-Aland are (1) the superiority of A with respect to the text of Revelation; (2) the parallel emphasis in 13:10ab as compared to 13:10cd; (3) the allusive background of the text in Jeremiah (LXX Jer 15:2; 50:11); (4) the preference for the more difficult and least 'doctored' reading.

upon Charles' proposed translation, "If any man is to be slain with the sword, he is to be slain with the sword."⁹¹ Indeed, the notion that this statement reaches to the core of what must be accepted and internalized is supported by the suggestion that it has a decretal character,⁹² expressing "a command to do what is decreed."⁹³ Death in this context is not decreed by fate but by the principle to which the one who may be about to suffer death is bound by virtue of his or her commitment to the divinely ordained commission.⁹⁴

(3) The concluding exhortation heightens the sense of standing face to face with a matter of essential importance, Ὡδέ ἐστὶν ἡ ὑπομονὴ καὶ ἡ πίστις τῶν ἁγίων (13:10e). Addressing a situation that calls for perseverance and faithfulness,⁹⁵ it also lays bare the essence of the faith for which Revelation contends. The contested value that is to be safeguarded is only partly appreciated if the injunction is limited to the Roman Empire and the specific context of the myth of Nero's return. Should the situation envisioned by the myth materialize whether or not the myth is reflected in Revelation, it, too, would call for perseverance and faith. The conditions envisioned in Revelation, however, extend the reality of the cosmic conflict to its logical and

⁹¹ Charles, *Revelation*, 356. Aune (*Revelation 6-16*, 731) translates it, "If anyone is to be slain with the sword, he will be slain with the sword." This makes for better English than Charles' translation, but it obscures the repetitive and decretal character of the protasis and the apodosis in the Greek text. The NIV and the NJB adopt similar translations on the basis of the preferred text in Nestle-Aland.

⁹² Beale, *Revelation*, 706.

⁹³ Lambrecht, "Rev 13,9-10," 334.

⁹⁴ This outlook and emphasis contrast sharply with the translation of the NRSV, "If you are to be taken captive, into captivity you go; if you kill with the sword, with the sword you must be killed" (13:10). Not only does this rendition introduce a jarring disjunction between the two like-sounding phrases but it also conveys ambivalence with respect to whether the principle in question is to encourage resignation in the face of persecution or to decree vengeance on the persecutor. It should be rejected for the general reasons noted above and specifically because it reflects the logic of *ius talionis* that does not fit the context. The KJV and the NKJV reflect the same textual *Vorlage* as the NRSV.

⁹⁵ "This is why the saints must have perseverance and faith" (13:10, NJB).

inevitable conclusion by representations – and ultimately by realities – that require something more than the myth of Nero’s return and the colluding interest of the imperial cult. God, who was misrepresented by the ancient serpent at the dawn of human history, is in the perspective of Revelation the object of renewed and intensified misrepresentation in the eschatological drama (13:5-6). The character of the divine government has been revealed through the slaughtered Lamb (5:6), but the message is threatened by forces aspiring to usurp it (13:3, 11), not only by a historical parody contemporary to John. The slaughtered Lamb has disclosed the means by which the truth is to triumph (13:10), mapping a route that is reminiscent of the one he walked himself. In Revelation’s larger narrative the juxtaposition of satanic misrepresentation and Christological vindication are inseparable, constituting the implicit premise for the unfolding historical spectacle. For this reason the believers must not only keep faith in the face of persecution; they must not let go of the means by which God has identified and defined himself in the cosmic conflict. The faith of the believer must be informed and fortified by the means by which God has revealed his faithfulness, and the one who is to “follow the Lamb wherever he goes” must know where the Lamb goes in order to follow (14:4).

Conclusion

The foregoing points have critiqued the role of the myth of Nero’s return in order to attenuate its stranglehold on critical interpretations of Revelation and with the specific aim of keeping the interpretation of ἡ πίστις Ἰησοῦ in a larger context. According to the present interpretation, the myth of Nero’s return mirrors issues that broadly speaking reflect “the claims of patriotism and religion,”⁹⁶ but the imperial threat is

⁹⁶ Charles, *Revelation*, I, 333.

neither fully paradigmatic nor climactic in the sense suggested by the metaphors of Revelation. Reiterating the assessment that Revelation's perspective originates in the theme of cosmic conflict, the momentum of this theme remains undiminished and is greatly enhanced by the depiction in Revelation 13. As the final phase of the cosmic conflict is concerned about ἡ μαρτυρία Ἰησοῦ (12:17), the historical manifestations of the opposing side in Revelation 13 serve to define further ἡ πίστις τῶν ἀγίων (13:10), and the call at the end of this section cannot overstate the importance of understanding and keeping ἡ πίστις Ἰησοῦ (14:12).

APPENDIX II

PISTIS IESOU AND THE THEOLOGY OF REVELATION

While the following outline of how the term *pistis Iesou* embodies the message and the theology of Revelation is not crucial to the main argument of the thesis, it is more than an afterthought. On the one hand, this appendix echoes the conviction that Revelation is best read as a theodicy. On the other hand, it is intended as the beginning of a dialogue with others to whom the reality of evil is a central concern as much as it is in the Book of Revelation.

Narrative Foundation

It is a crucial contention of the present interpretation that the narrative parameters of Revelation exert a decisive influence on the meaning of ἡ πίστις Ἰησοῦ, constituting the main warrant for translating this expression 'the faithfulness of Jesus.' Making this claim on behalf of Revelation's narrative is not exceptional, of course. All exegesis is circumscribed by the recognition that the meaning of a text is determined by its context, and 'narrative' in this sense merely another way of pointing to the importance of the context.

Nevertheless, employing the term 'narrative' specifies a distinctive approach to ascertaining matters of context that has advantages over the more general notion of 'context' itself. 'Narrative' suggests that a story is being told. The story has a beginning, a middle, and an ending. It lays out a plot and proposes a resolution. It presents characters of various kinds, the characterization and perception of which are critical to the story. Where the pursuit of 'the context' may get entangled in a piecemeal approach that atomizes and obscures the whole, the emphasis on narrative

provides a safeguard that the whole will not be lost. Moreover, if the sense of the whole is intrinsic to a narrative, it is particularly apt with respect to Revelation whose author, by the threefold ἃ εἶδες καὶ ἃ εἰσὶν καὶ ἃ μέλλει γενέσθαι (1:19), is commissioned to disclose a comprehensive story. Thus, like the reader of any story, it falls to the reader of Revelation to take in the whole of the story that is told. Quite unlike other narratives, however, Revelation aspires to tell *the whole story*, or at least *a very large story* that has a primordial beginning and an ending that leads beyond this world, deploying an array of Old Testament allusions and echoes in order to accomplish its monumental task.¹

Revelation's comprehensive sweep of human reality is set in the narrative context of the cosmic conflict. In the most succinct glimpse of this conflict, Revelation reports that "war broke out in heaven" (12:7), featuring an adversarial character known as "the great dragon, the ancient serpent," *alias* "the devil and Satan" (12:9). It is safe to assume that this character had less need of introduction to the original audience of Revelation than he does today. Repeated allusions to the Old Testament offer tantalizing hints as to how Revelation construes his identity and background. According to the evocative poem in Isaiah, the fallen opponent was once an exalted heavenly being known as the "Day Star, son of Dawn," or more descriptive still, 'the Shining One' (Isa 14:12). Ezekiel writes that this illustrious being underwent a mysterious transformation that his poem proposes to report but not to explain, "You were blameless in your ways from the day that you were created, until iniquity was found in you" (Ezek 28:15).

But this heavenly being is not predictably and stereotypically evil on the order of modern notions of the demonic even in contexts where the reality of the demonic is treated dismissively. When Revelation 12 sets up the historic showdown between the

¹ If omniscience is a characteristic feature of biblical narrative, as indicated by Meir Sternberg (*The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985], 84-128), this feature rises to unprecedented heights in Revelation.

cosmic adversary and the woman that is pregnant and “crying out in birth pangs, in the agony of giving birth” (12:2), it alludes to the story of the fall in the Garden of Eden (Gen 3:15-16). In the Genesis story the subversion of the divine character and government depends entirely on what the serpent says (Gen 3:1), featuring a verbal missive so specious and well aimed that even when its blatant falsehood is corrected (Gen 3:2), the impact is not fully deflected (Gen 3:3-6).

On the basis of these narrative parameters the adversary in Revelation cannot be written off as a mere amplifying metaphor for evil, a figure of speech of what is ultimately only a human problem. Second, he cannot be passed over as a banal character that is devoid of intentionality, a personage whose repertoire is limited to the mechanical execution of evil actions. Third, the opponent in the cosmic conflict does not play the part of a figure from Madame Tussaud’s wax cabinet, a mere fixture that has at all times been dressed in black. Instead, evil in Revelation arises from a personal agent who executes his intentions as carefully as they are conceived. Most importantly, he has not always been dressed in the black garb befitting evil. His significance in the cosmic conflict derives from the fact that he was once ‘the Shining One’ (Isa 14:12).

These narrative elements challenge the perspective that is more or less taken for granted in critical readings of Revelation. Where the latter view sees the Roman Empire, the myth of Nero’s return, and the imperial cult as the leading agencies in Revelation’s view of evil, casting the “the ancient serpent” as little more than a trivial background nuisance, the narrative reading advocated here inverts this relationship. What is dismissed as mythological background moves on this reading into the narrative foreground as the main determinant of the plot, and the alleged allegory describing events playing out at the time contemporary to the author is reinterpreted to fit the

comprehensive narrative of the cosmic rebellion and the shattering implications of this reality in heaven and on earth.

As noted in the inquiry into the story line of Revelation, many, if not most, critical interpreters find themselves at a loss to explain the meaning of the capture and release of Satan toward the end of the narrative (20:1-3; 7-10).² I take this as evidence demonstrating the inadequacy of readings that make Nero and the Roman Empire the leading determinants of Revelation's story. The release of Satan is certainly a stunning turn of events in any reading of Revelation, likely to compel any reader to retrace his or her steps in the narrative, but it is particularly jarring to readings that do not give "the ancient serpent" much attention in the first place. For such readings it is disturbing to find a supposedly insignificant character suddenly thrust into the narrative limelight as if to prove beyond the shadow of a doubt that his role has been underestimated. In this thesis I argue that such readings are insensitive with respect to the actual narrative and myopic with respect to the biblical and historical scope of Revelation. Indeed, it demeans the plot of Revelation and the startling turn in its narrative to encounter mostly indifferent and dismissive comments in the face of the profoundly disquieting prospect that Satan is again to be released when the conflict seems all but over (20:3, 7).

And yet, faced with the most troubling questions of human existence, grasping the plot is not easy. In a different context Marilyn McCord Adams speaks to the perceived inadequacy of theoretical theodicies that try to sort out the problem of evil by means of metaphysical and philosophical propositions. In her view such theoretical constructs fail to deliver meaning because, ultimately, "meaning-making operates on

² Commenting on Rev 20:3, Bøe (*Gog and Magog*, 256-57) poses a case in point. "The text avoids any explanation of what necessity it is that leads to Satan's freedom. The note in v. 7 about the events taking place after the thousand years, when Satan indeed is released from his prison, does not give much help either, since it simply states that he was released from his prison."

the level of *narrative*.”³ Her advice to those who are engaged in largely futile attempts to address the reality of evil in philosophical terms, is to make the switch to a different genre. “When horrendous evils leave participants floundering, what is needed is not ontological reflection but plot invention!” she writes emphatically.⁴

The reader of Revelation does not need to switch to another genre or to resort to plot *invention*, but he or she needs to reconsider the plot. On this point the present interpretation contends that nothing more is required than to recognize what is there, that is, to appreciate the profoundly narrational character of the book and the fact that Revelation, like other narratives, seeks the resolution of its own plot. When the reader of Revelation stands bewildered in the face of the reality of evil in general, and then has the problem aggravated by the disclosure that Satan is again to be released (20:3), the requisite remedy is to return to the drawing board for a more determined scrutiny of the plot grounded in the narrative ingredients.

Accepting that Revelation’s story is profoundly concerned about the reality of evil, it must be recognized that the narrative logic of Revelation differs from propositional logic. The story line of Revelation does not unfold in order to meet a previously established philosophical requirement, and it reflects the perception of reality that was held by its author and his original readers. Richard B. Hays says of narratives that “if we ask why the events of a particular story are ordered as they are and not some other way, the answer can only be ‘because that is the way it happened’ or ‘because that is how the story is told.’”⁵ Revelation should therefore be read on the terms of its narrative logic even if it espouses a world view and perception of reality

³ Marilyn McCord Adams, *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), 185. This is not to intimate that Adams looks to Revelation and its description of cosmic conflict for the narrative that fulfils her quest for meaning in the face of horrendous evil.

⁴ Adams, *Horrendous Evils*, 185.

⁵ Hays, *Faith of Jesus Christ*, 195.

that differ from today's outlook, and its dualistic worldview must be appreciated even though it may be at variance with our own. Any assessment of 'fittingness' or explanatory power for today's audience should be deferred until the narrative has been thoroughly absorbed.

Theological Contours

In developing the story line of Revelation, I have prioritized the task of placing 'the faithfulness of Jesus' in the apposite sounding chamber so as to become resonant with the theme of cosmic conflict. On the one hand, there is outright misrepresentation of the character of God and the divine government on the part of the adversarial agent and his cohorts (Gen 3:1; Rev 13:5-6), and, on the other hand, there is bewilderment, ignorance, and misperception of God's ways (5:1-3; 6:9-10). In this context the presentation of the slaughtered Lamb "in the middle" (5:6) shifts the focus to Jesus as "the true and faithful witness" in the conflict (3:14; 19:11). He has been faithful with respect to bringing God's character to light, resolving any misperception as to what God is truly like. I have suggested that this disclosure also has a persuasive intent in the sense that God's ways differ from what is expected and from what is thought to be effectual in the eyes of the created realm (5:3). The presentation of the slaughtered Lamb must therefore be seen as an unveiling and vindication of God. Eugene Boring captures the idea that even though *two* persons are in view with respect to the throne, the disclosure is intended to highlight the character of the *one*, and the God-centred meaning must not be missed.

This does not mean that the throne of the universe is occupied by two persons, but that God, the ruler of the universe, has functionally defined his rule with his act in Jesus. Revelation's Christology, like New Testament Christology generally, is not a response to the question "Who is Jesus?" but "Who is God?" Jesus does not replace God, here or anywhere else in Revelation. God rules, but

God has definitively manifested his rule in Jesus (11:15), who turned out not to be the Lion who devoured our enemies but the Lamb who was slain.⁶

Bauckham, who concurs with this view with respect to the theology of Revelation,⁷ elaborates the same theocentric understanding of the suffering of Jesus in another context, writing that “the passion is existential and significantly political, but above all it is *theo*-logical and in the proper sense concerned with *who God really is*.”⁸ For this view to stand fully developed and apply in force, it is essential to make the assumption that the slaughtered Lamb of Revelation is not another Jesus than the one known from the rest of the New Testament. Continuity with the earthly Jesus must be a matter of course for this to come out right, lest “a myth about some new heavenly being threatens to take the place of Jesus of Nazareth,”⁹ thus throwing the meaning of the slaughtered Lamb into eclipse.

What is underexposed if not entirely missing in the emphases noted above is the adversarial aspect and the misrepresentation of God that lies at the heart of the opponent’s strategy. God is revealed in the slaughtered Lamb of Revelation (5:6), but the revelation is placed in a cosmic setting. Its ultimate antecedent is the war in heaven and the attempted subversion by ‘the Shining One,’ and the cosmic scope indicates that the conflict cannot be understood in earthly and human terms alone. What is revealed and affirmed by the slaughtered Lamb relates to what has been actively contradicted

⁶ Boring, “Theology of Revelation,” 266.

⁷ Bauckham, *Revelation*, 64.

⁸ Richard Bauckham, foreword to Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God* (trans. R. A. Wilson and John Bowden; London: SCM Press, 1974, 2001), ix.

⁹ Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope* (trans. James W. Leitch; London: SCM Press, 1967), 300. Moltmann’s statement is not made with reference to Revelation, but it applies specifically to the connection between apocalyptic expectation and the past revelation of Jesus in history.

and misrepresented by the opponent, aiming to resolve any perplexity and to correct any misperception.

But even the positive manifestation of ‘the faithfulness of Jesus,’ understood in the sense of revealing the character of the divine government, does not bring the cosmic conflict to an end (12:13-17). It is with an eye to the rationale behind the continuation of the conflict that two of Revelation’s most characteristic verbal determinants are best understood. The words δεῖ and ἐδόθη make the unveiling of Revelation unfold under the twin parameters of *necessity* and *permission*,¹⁰ each shedding light on the other and each implicitly operative when the call to hold on to ‘the faithfulness of Jesus’ is sounded most urgently (14:12).

δεῖ

ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι ἐν τάχει (1:1)

ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι μετὰ ταῦτα (4:1)

μετὰ ταῦτα δεῖ λυθῆναι αὐτὸν μικρὸν χρόνον (20:3)

ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι ἐν τάχει (22:6)

Again, δεῖ denotes necessity, but it is important to reiterate that it does not signify necessity in a deterministic sense.¹¹ Instead, the conspicuous deployment of this term reflects the character of the divine government and has a revelatory intent, indicating a line of thought that is ideologically and thematically significant in the context of the cosmic conflict. It is also noteworthy that the notion of necessity extends to the unexpected release of Satan at the end of the thousand years (20:3). What defines the course of action as necessary, I suggest, is the character of the person who deems the action a necessity; that is to say, the character of God determines the action here as

¹⁰ The most important texts invoking δεῖ, suggesting actions of necessity, are Rev 1:1; 4:1; 11:5; 17:10; 20:3; 22:6. ἐδόθη is used 21 times in all and most often in the sense of a divine permissive rather than as circumlocutions of divine action; cf. Rev. 6:2, 4 (x2), 8, 11; 7:2; 8:3; 9:1, 3, 5; 11:1, 2; 13:5 (x2), 7 (x2), 14, 15; 16:8; 19:8; 20:4.

¹¹ According to Mazzaferri (*Genre*, 382-83), the absence of a deterministic outlook sets Revelation apart from the apocalyptic genre.

much as it is revealed in the figure of the slaughtered Lamb. Secondly, the necessity that is in view flows from the nature of the plot and what is required in order to bring the conflict to a definitive end.

Like *δεῖ*, the aorist passive *ἐδόθη* is a widely diffused and characteristic term in Revelation.

ἐδόθη

καὶ...ἐδόθη αὐτῷ λαβεῖν τὴν εἰρήνην ἐκ τῆς γῆς (6:4)
καὶ ἐδόθη αὐτῷ ἡ κλεῖς τοῦ φρέατος τῆς ἀβύσσου (9:1)
καὶ ἐδόθη αὐτοῖς ἵνα μὴ ἀποκτείνωσιν αὐτούς (9:5)
καὶ ἐδόθη αὐτῷ στόμα λαλοῦν μέγαρα καὶ βλασφημίας (13:5)
καὶ ἐδόθη αὐτῷ ποιῆσαι πόλεμον μετὰ τῶν ἁγίων (13:7)
καὶ ἐδόθη αὐτῷ δοῦναι πνεῦμα τῇ εἰκόνι τοῦ θηρίου (13:15)

In the context of the cosmic conflict, recognizing the reality of the opposing side, this word, as shown in the examples above, is best understood in a permissive sense.¹² Taking this term mainly as circumlocution of divine activity, as though discretely to conceal God as the actual subject of the action, at best opens the door to a host of possible misinterpretations and at worst makes God the agent of the calamitous and cruel deeds that are reported. The emphasis on divine agency, therefore, seeking to hold the notion of divine sovereignty unsullied, tends to obscure the cosmic dualism of Revelation. It closes the chasm separating the warring sides, blending the two into one and leaving the impression that there is only one agent at work and only one will. In contrast, when *ἐδόθη* is understood permissively, the opposing side remains in full view, and the reader is constantly reminded that the disclosure of Revelation not only reveals God but also aims to unveil and expose the truth about the opposing side.¹³ Necessity and permission go hand in hand in a common revelatory purpose. “After that

¹² BDAG (art. *δίδωμι*, 1:243) gives the permissive sense of *ἐδόθη* as “permit, allow, grant by formal action.”

¹³ Thus Vögtle (“Der Gott der Apokalypse,” 383), God “is not the only one who is at work in this world – as the Apocalypse makes so abundantly clear.”

he must be let out for a little while,” says John (20:3), and the logic behind this course of action must be sought in the guiding revelatory intention.

Implosion is therefore the term that best describes the gradual demise of evil in Revelation. The progression and forward movement of the cycles of seven describe calamities that are not only escalating in intensity and extent but are also increasingly demonic in character (9:5; 16:13-14). From the seals to the trumpets and finally to the bowls, evil has increasing leeway because the restraint imposed on the agencies of evil is gradually loosened (7:1; 9:14-15; 15:1).

Important leads in the Old Testament strengthen the notion that self-destruction is at work. Even if the description of the fall of Babylon (17:1-18:24) and of the end-time battle in Revelation (19:17-21; 20:7-10) seems bewildering at times, self-destruction is etched on the narrative that runs underneath the rhetorical smoke. The decisive battles in Revelation echo the eschatological battle of Gog of Magog in Ezekiel (Ezek 38-39; cf. Rev 19:17-21; 20:7-10). In Sverre Bøe’s careful analysis of these chapters, he observes that the enemy comes with his forces “from the remotest parts of the north” (Ezek 38:6), repeating it three times (Ezek 38:6, 15; 39:2).¹⁴ He notes that this geographical detail recalls the poem of ‘the Shining One’ in Isaiah, whose ambition it was to “sit on the mount of assembly in the recesses of the north” (Isa 14:13, NASB).¹⁵

This connection places the eschatological battle within the purview of the aspiration of ‘the Shining One.’ In a figurative sense the one who comes “from the remotest parts of the north,” emerges from the territory where the divine throne is

¹⁴ Bøe, *Gog and Magog*, 114-15.

¹⁵ Bøe, *Gog and Magog*, 115. The stability of this phrase must be seen as a conveyor of meaning.

located (cf. Ezek 1:4).¹⁶ In the context of the last phase of the cosmic conflict in Revelation, the direct allusion to Gog and Magog (20:8) appropriates the connotation of agency and finality in Ezekiel's prophecy. It suggests that it is on the strength of the original aspiration to have the lead role "in the remotest parts of the north," if not from that very place, that the final attack that leads to the end is launched.¹⁷

But Ezekiel's greatest contribution, at least in the present context, lies in the less recognized feature of who does what in the eschatological battle. He, too, promotes a vision of the futile and self-destructive character of evil, envisioning corrosion and dissolution within the ranks of the forces of Gog. "I will summon the sword against Gog in all my mountains, says the Lord God; *the swords of all will be against their comrades*" (Ezek 38:21). This is an unambiguous picture of self-inflicted dissolution, the evil force falling by its own hand, and it espouses a view that is not unique to Ezekiel (Isa 19:2; Zech 14:13).¹⁸

On the grounds sketched above, the end of 'the Shining One' in Revelation conforms to Origen's contention that "every sinner kindles for himself the flame of his own fire, and is not plunged into a fire which has been previously kindled by someone else or which existed before him."¹⁹ The story of the binding and release of Satan in Revelation and its Old Testament antecedents picture such close convergence between the destruction he brings on himself and the destruction that seems to be brought to him

¹⁶ Bøe, *Gog and Magog*, 115.

¹⁷ Bøe (*Gog and Magog*, 121) points out that the eschatological battle in Ezekiel belongs to "a coming day, a special day of Yahweh" designated as "*that day*" (Ezek 38:10, 14, 18, 19; 39:8, 11, 13, 22). A few examples demonstrate the connotation that Ezekiel's prophecy brings to Revelation and its view of "the great day of God the Almighty" (16:14). "On *that day* (הַיּוֹם הַהוּא) thoughts will come into your mind, and you will devise an evil scheme" (Ezek 38:10). "On *that day* (הַיּוֹם הַהוּא) when my people Israel are living securely, you will rouse yourself" (Ezek 38:14). "It has come! It has happened, says the Lord God. *This is the day* (הַיּוֹם הַהוּא) of which I have spoken" (Ezek 39:8).

¹⁸ Bøe, *Gog and Magog*, 122.

¹⁹ Origen, *First Principles* II.10.4.

that the root cause must be sought in the agent's own activity. In Revelation there is an end to evil, but the end is not arbitrary or rushed, and it is not a destruction wrought from without. Ezekiel's depiction of the end of the "covering cherub" remains crucial to this perspective. "So I brought out fire from within you; *it* consumed you" (Ezek 28:18).

Theodicy

In the opening sentence of this thesis I suggest that Revelation should be read as "a theodicy of God's handling of the reality of evil from its inception to its demise." Now that the story line has been presented and its relation to *pistis Iesou* argued, it is well to ask whether *theodicy* still seems like a suitable term for the thrust of Revelation's narrative.²⁰ While the limitations of this term must be acknowledged, Revelation's story unfolds on its own terms and within its own distinctive parameters so as to ensure that if the term is retained with respect to Revelation, it is not necessarily affected by the sometimes savage critique that has been levelled against theodicy.

Nevertheless, Revelation's prestige may not be enhanced by this classification even if the concept proves to be representative. Theodicy has a dubious reputation in theology,²¹ ranging from those who see it as a brazen proof of humanity's fallen condition,²² as a failed enterprise,²³ or as a pursuit that is misguided, presumptuous, and

²⁰ On the assumption that Revelation belongs to the genre of apocalyptic literature, Boring ("Theology of Revelation," 260) intimates that Revelation, like apocalyptic, has the attributes of a "pictorial narrative theodicy." Specifically seeking out theodicy in the Bible, Aussi Simojoki ("The Book of Revelation," in *Theodicy in the World of the Bible* [eds. Antti Laato and Johannes C. de Moor Leiden: Brill, 2003], 652-84) places Revelation's message in the category of theodicy.

²¹ Kenneth Surin ("Theodicy?" *HTR* 76 [1983], 225) says that despite much effort throughout the centuries, "theodicy is perhaps one of the least satisfactory areas of the theological enterprise." This assessment seems to be confirmed by the divergent contemporary views on the subject; see e.g. Stephen T. Davis, ed., *Encountering Evil: live options in theodicy* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1981).

²² In his discussion of Job's suffering, Karl Barth (*Church Dogmatics* [trans. G. W. Bromily and R. J. Ehrlich Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1960], IV.3, 431) writes that Job should serve God "with no

downright harmful.²⁴ Theodicy is faulted because it asks the wrong question;²⁵ it attempts something that cannot be done;²⁶ it is seen as a modernist phenomenon expressing a presumption typical of the Enlightenment and not a biblical concern;²⁷ it leaves God and faith at a serious disadvantage in terms of authority;²⁸ and it tends to produce cold, detached, and theoretical answers that have no utility in the face of the actual suffering of real people.²⁹

claim that His [God's] rule should conform to some picture which he [Job] has formed of it." God "does not as for his [Job's] understanding, agreement or applause. On the contrary, He simply asks that he should be content not to know why and to what end he exists, and does so in this way and not another." Harold M. Schulweis ("Karl Barth's Job: Morality and Theodicy," *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 65 [1975], 157) comments that in Barth's thought "the need for theodicy is itself a symptom of man's enslavement to moral and logical criteria and norms irrelevant to the conduct of the divinely unique One. ... The very question which underlies the alleged need for theodicy is presumptuous." Accordingly, God is accountable to nobody, and certainly not to sinful human beings, and the need to justify God is an unacceptable concession to an excessively anthropocentric outlook; cf. R. Scott Rodin, *Evil and Theodicy in the Theology of Karl Barth* (ISS 3; New York: Peter Lang, 1997), 2-3.

²³ Louis Dupré, "Evil – A Religious Mystery: A plea for a more inclusive model of theodicy," *Faith and Philosophy* 7 (1990), 261-80.

²⁴ Terrence W. Tilley (*The Evils of Theodicy* [Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1991]) claims that theodicy downplays the reality of evil, misreads ancient texts (such as Job and Augustine), aggravate the Humean problem of evil, offers no real consolation to the sufferer, and is utopian in its motivation and outlook.

²⁵ In what is called Barth's "pantheological premise" (cf. Jacob Taubes, "Theodicy and Theology: A Philosophical Analysis of Karl Barth's Dialectical Theology," *Journal of Religion* 34 [1954], 231-43), the question is not how to justify God in the face of the reality of evil but the justification of fallen humanity.

²⁶ Adams (*Horrendous Evils*, 33, 155-56) faults the free will defence of Alvin Plantinga and the soul-making theodicy of John Hick on the ground that both appear to justify the reality of evil by invoking the notion of a higher good. Her objection is primarily that theodicies, whatever their explanation, come up short precisely because their emphasis is *explanation*, and specifically because viable *partial* explanations are inflated to look like a *total* explanation.

²⁷ Tilley (*Evils of Theodicy*, 2) implies that the enterprise of theodicy is incriminated by its alleged origin in the eighteenth century, exemplified by G. W. Leibnitz, *Theodicy: Essays on the Goodness of God, the Freedom of Man and the Origin of Evil* (trans. E. M. Huggard Chicago: Open Court, 1988); and by David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (Oxford World's Classics; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992). Leibnitz' work was first published in 1710, Hume's in 1779.

²⁸ Among the reasons for Tilley's sweeping objections to theodicy (*Evils of Theodicy*, 136), the weakening of external authority is a major concern. Claiming that Augustine's position with respect to evil is frequently misunderstood or misrepresented, he seeks to restore the bite of the authoritative voice. "Obscuring his communicative action may disable those readers who properly depend on his authoritative voice. That is a problem which those who engage in the discourse practice of theodicy are at least responsible for transmitting." A similar concern is implicit in Barth's theology although it is articulated with greater subtlety.

²⁹ Cf. Adams, *Horrendous Evils*, 184.

Whether the reasons for this negative assessment are theological or philosophical, they need to be placed in a historical perspective. This will show that, while theodicy may be modernist concern that takes on a particular character in the context of the Enlightenment, it is not a new-fangled enterprise that is completely alien to the Christian tradition. On the contrary, understood in a generic sense, the roots of theodicy run deep in the soil of early Christianity, reflecting a concern that stood in the foreground at the time when the verities of Christian belief could not be taken for granted.³⁰ Moreover, the tendency to treat Augustine as the benchmark of the free-will theodicy puts the status of theodicy at a disadvantage because Augustine's contribution reflects the Christian theodicy at a time when it is in a state of flux if not already in steep decline.³¹ Finally, theologians are found to engage in the practice of theodicy

³⁰ The apologetic character of Origen's *Contra Celsum* (c. 244 C.E.) is noteworthy, particularly his narrative argumentation for the Christian understanding of evil; cf. Origen: *Contra Celsum* 6.42. When Christianity became ascendant following the conversion of the emperor Constantine, it underwent a transformation that has been described as a contraction. To Eric Osborn ("The Apologist Origen and the Fourth Century: From Theodicy to Christology," in *Origeniana Septima* [eds. W. A. Bienert and U. Kühneweg Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1999], 51-59), this transformation took place in a triumphalist context, leading to two contractions in theology. "Theology was narrowed, first, because the rule no longer had the need for the apocalyptic, Gnostic extensions of Origen's theodicy and second, because the whole rule was packed into christology and trinity" (p. 58). Origen's theodicy had a persuasive intent, speaking as a member of a powerless minority. Unlike later writers, he could not count on the coercive arm of the state to bring about conformity to Christian dogma.

³¹ David Ray Griffin (*God, Power, and Evil: A Process Theodicy* [Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1976]) begins his critique of Christian theodicy with Augustine even though Augustine's priorities as an exegete and apologist may be biased by the changing political fortunes of Christianity and by his own role as a person of power. Elaine Pagels ("The Politics of Paradise: Augustine's Exegesis of Genesis 1-3 versus that of John Chrysostom," *HTR* 78 [1985], 67-99) finds this possibility confirmed by the striking shift in tenor and emphasis in the changing use of the story of the Fall in the Garden of Eden. Where the Greek Fathers and John Chrysostom look to Genesis as the warrant for their belief in human freedom and the right of dissent, Augustine sees in the same story human bondage and the justification for coercion. At least in *The Problem of Free Choice* (trans. Dom Mark Pontifex; ACW 22; New York: Newman Press, 1955), philosophy trumps narrative as the pivot point of his argument, the latter already showing fading colours. Tilley (*Evils of Theodicy*, 115-17) argues that Augustine's writings on the subject are too polemical and situational to constitute a stable theodicy. Disputing the appeal to evolution and context in his thought, Rowan A. Greer ("Augustine's Transformation of the Free Will Defence," *FP* 13 [1996], 482-83) believes that the inconsistencies in Augustine's free-will defence do not show his shortcomings as a philosopher or even that his core argument is philosophical. Instead, Augustine is articulating his deepest convictions, finding in himself "an incapacity for good that leads him to suppose he cannot in any way help himself." Augustine's ambiguity with respect to the free-will defence with which he is credited, is further aggravated by the fact that he seems to come down on the side of J. L. Mackie in the most critical question in the debate. Mackie ("Evil and Omnipotence," in *The Problem of Evil* [eds. Marilyn McCord Adams and Robert

even when they disparage or decry it,³² and the quest for a persuasive theodicy may actually be the most decisive driving force in the work of some of the leading theologians of our time even where it is not explicitly acknowledged.³³

The most serious misconception behind the objection to theodicy, however, is the notion that theodicy is not a legitimate biblical enterprise, reflecting instead the irreverent and illegitimate urge to “discover what God has concealed from me.”³⁴ If theodicy proves to be a fitting characterization of Revelation’s message, it is not because the book is guilty of prying into hidden and forbidden secrets. Quite the contrary, Revelation urges the recipient to understand what God has revealed and what

Merrihew Adams; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990], 25-37) asserts in his influential 1955 essay that an omnipotent God could endow human beings with free will in such a way that they would choose the good on every occasion. This argument severely undercuts the notion of free will according to most free will defenders, rendering it virtually meaningless (cf. Alvin Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978], 164-74). However, in his view of redeemed humanity Augustine implicitly sides with Mackie, envisioning a state where the potentiality to sin no longer exists while still holding such a state to be compatible with freedom; cf. Sung-Keun You, “Why are there sinners? Augustine’s response to Mackie,” *IJPR* 37 (1995), 1-12. All this goes to show that Augustine’s ambiguity represents somewhat less than a ringing tribute to free will, anticipating the radical emphasis on God’s imperial will in Martin Luther (*The Bondage of the Will* [trans. J. I. Packer & O. R. Johnston; New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1957]) and the double predestination of John Calvin (cf. *Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion* [2 vols., ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles; Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960], Book III.xxi-xxv).

³² Rodin (*Evil and Theodicy*, 5) sees Barth’s treatment of evil widely diffused throughout his writings along lines that belong to the category of theodicy, far beyond the sustained treatment of *das Nichtige* in *Church Dogmatics* III.3, § 50. He singles out five sections in *Church Dogmatics* for special consideration (CD II.2, §32-35; CD III.1, §41-42; CD III.3, §48-49; CD III.3, §50; and CD IV.3, §69-70). It is striking that Rodin omits the chapter on “The Limits of Angelology” (CD III.3, § 51) in his selection. Nicholas Wolterstorff (“Barth on Evil,” *FP* 13 [1996], 598) notes that despite Barth’s insistence that evil is incomprehensible and inexplicable “there is much about evil that Barth professes to comprehend and explain – more than he should.”

³³ Theodicy lies at the heart of Jürgen Moltmann’s *The Crucified God*, not only by sounding the depths of human suffering and by making the cry of the abandoned sufferer in Psalm 22 paradigmatic for its theology of the cross but also by explicit interaction with the most stirring contemporary voices crying out against injustice (e.g. F. Dostoyevsky, Albert Camus, Elie Wiesel; cf. *The Crucified God*, 227-29; 303; see also Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of Jürgen Moltmann* [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1995], 71-98). But theodicy also looms as a large, unnamed presence in Moltmann’s *Theology of Hope* and in the appeal to history in Pannenberg’s theology of revelation (cf. Wolfhart Pannenberg, ed., *Revelation As History* [trans. David Granskou; New York: The Macmillan Company, 1968]). In the revelatory function of history and thus of history as a reference point for meaning there is significant common ground between the theologians Moltmann and Pannenberg, and Revelation; cf. Michael Gilbertson, *God and History in the Book of Revelation: New Testament Studies in Dialogue with Pannenberg and Moltmann* (SNTSMS 124; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

³⁴ Nikolai Berdyaev (1874-1948) in Donald A. Lowrie, *Christian Existentialism: A Berdyaev Anthology* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1965), 41.

God wants the believer to know.³⁵ To the extent that the modern theodicy has the reputation of wanting to know more than what has been revealed, or that theodicy professes to explain more than it can possibly deliver, Revelation turns the perceived relationship between the human questioner and the divine revealer on its head.³⁶ In Revelation the initiative and aim of the revealer exceed the inquisitiveness of the human subject (1:3; 3:1; 3:15, 17; 13:9). Rather than presenting the picture of a reluctant revealer, the divine concern in Revelation confronts human complacency and indifference as the limiting obstacle, and this view obtains even more when the rhetorical situation of Revelation, as argued here, is taken to be a danger of which the recipients of the book are significantly unaware.

The pivotal question in Revelation belongs in the category of theodicy (5:2), but the axis around which the theodicy revolves is not turned by a human question. Instead, the question that no one is able to answer may be seen, too, as the question no one dares to ask (5:3). It raises a subject that has been initiated and authorized from on high, articulating, implicitly, a deeply and widely held concern, but the fact of its articulation does not come about by a human initiative. The question is on the agenda in the heavenly council, humanly speaking, because God wants created beings in heaven and on earth to know. In response to the theodicy question in Revelation Christ is manifested as a slaughtered Lamb, not in order to rebut questions but in order to make discernment possible. While history becomes the field of revelation in the process of the unveiling of God's purpose, the events that occur are not self-explanatory. They must be deciphered and explained by the slaughtered Lamb and understood in the light

³⁵This is evident in each of the messages to the seven churches (2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22), and the same concern echoes throughout the book (13:9, 18; 17:1, 9; 21:9).

³⁶ Surin ("Theodicy?" 244) writes wisely that "if Berdyaev's dictum is augmented with the principle that man can discover what God has concealed from him only if God first chooses to reveal it to him, then it follows that theodicy is, in an important sense, an extension of the theology of revelation."

of his act of surrender and self-sacrifice. Revelation's cycles of seven recapitulate the message that the full theodicy requires and awaits the eschatological consummation in order to be complete (8:1; 11:15-19; 15:1; 16:17), and yet victory is ensured by the slaughtered Lamb (5:12-13; 12:10). The opponent in the conflict is faced with the realization that although the conflict is not over, "he knows that his time is short" (12:12).

It is not difficult to single out the dualistic character of Revelation's theodicy as the distinctive that makes it stand out in sharp contrast to contemporary attempts to formulate a theodicy, whether implicit or explicit. Karl Barth's theodicy belongs to the implicit category, eschewing the classic dualism between God and Satan, and Barth must, according to R. Scott Rodin, "be credited for constructing a doctrine of evil devoid of such a concept."³⁷ In Barth's opinion, angels "are not independent and autonomous subjects like God and man and Jesus Christ."³⁸ Indeed, the angels, and presumably also the fallen angels and their leader, "are essentially marginal figures."³⁹ John Hick pursues an explicit theodicy that includes a detailed history of the subject, but he is even less constrained by the dualist tenor of the biblical narrative than is Barth.⁴⁰ For him the dualist perspective must be dismissed because it is incompatible with what "most educated inhabitants of the modern world" are prepared to accept.⁴¹

³⁷ Rodin, *Evil and Theodicy*, 114.

³⁸ Barth, *Church Dogmatics* III.3 §51, 371.

³⁹ Barth, *Church Dogmatics* III.3 §51, 371.

⁴⁰ John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1966).

⁴¹ John H. Hick, "An Ireanean Theodicy," in Davis, ed., *Encountering Evil*, 40; idem., *Evil and the God of Love*, 266, 282. Hick's striving to conform his theodicy to 'modern' concepts of the world is intended to increase its plausibility, but it dooms his theodicy by the same criterion. He acknowledges that his view is wholly dependent on "eschatological fulfilment" in order to be coherent, but "eschatological fulfilment" is hardly any more plausible than the elements of the Christian narrative that Hick has decided to forego. Hick should be commended for candidly admitting to this problem (cf. "An Ireanean Theodicy," 51).

Hints of the cosmic dualism that is characteristic of Revelation are also conspicuous by their absence in the implicit theodicy of Jürgen Moltmann and in Marilyn McCord Adams' explicit treatment of the subject.⁴² Both are careful to avoid any causal or explanatory inquiry into evil, addressing instead the reality of evil as it is known in present human experience. Both are oriented toward the means for defeating evil, and both, like the theodicy in Revelation, present a Christological solution.⁴³

Moltmann urges that the separation of the Son from the Father on the cross "is something which takes place within God himself,"⁴⁴ and, in a self-avowed exaggeration, the cry of Jesus does not only mean, "My God, why has thou forsaken me?" but at the same time, 'My God, why hast thou forsaken *thyself*?'"⁴⁵ In this intense, demanding, and almost excruciating dialectic, God reaches out to victim and perpetrator alike. "God in Christ crucified is God casting His lot with the cursed and blaspheming (and hence with the perpetrators of horrors) as well," and this identification invests the experience of suffering with meaning to the extent that once it is understood, the victim will not wish it away.⁴⁶ In all of this, it must be noted, God is acting on God's own, in the absence of any personal opponent on the order of 'the Shining One.' Unlike Revelation's narrative theodicy, there is no external factor, no blasphemous voice smearing the divine character, and no guise that needs to be removed in order for the opponent to stand exposed.

⁴² This assessment is based on Moltmann's *The Crucified God* and Adams' *Horrendous Evils*.

⁴³ Adams (*Horrendous Evils*, 174) invokes Revelation directly, pointing to the divine and the human in Christ as the reason "why it is 'the Lamb that was slain' Who is worthy to open the meaning of history (Rev. 5:6-10)."

⁴⁴ Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 154.

⁴⁵ Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 153.

⁴⁶ Adams, *Horrendous Evils*, 166.

Revelation may therefore seem more at home with theodicies that straddle the fence⁴⁷ or take the plunge unreservedly toward its dualistic outlook.⁴⁸ Nevertheless, even in the examples touched on here there are evident points of contact to Revelation's distinctive narrative. The struggle to make the elements of human reality add up within a monist structure cannot be hidden; the problem is really that a transparent computation of the various elements adds up to far more than what the monist framework is able to hold, and the monist aspiration is straining at the oars no less than the dualist account. In my view the monist edifice is cracking under the pressure of unresolved tensions, inviting a second look that becomes more compelling because of elements that are better accounted for in a dualist context.⁴⁹

Barth, too, recognizes evil as a power,⁵⁰ and his "metaphors of God are the metaphors of one engaged in combat, not the metaphors of one engaged in blissful

⁴⁷ I count Walter Wink's work in this category. Although Wink does not purport to present a theodicy; striving instead to restore to evil a portion of its lost stature, his work is nevertheless a sustained attempt to shed light on the character of evil; cf. Walter Wink, *Naming the Powers: The Language of Power in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984); idem., *Unmasking the Powers: The Invisible Powers That Determine Human Existence* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986); idem., *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992). Wink (*Unmasking the Powers*, 24-25) eschews the personification of evil as a dangerous fallacy but is equally intent on retaining the notion of evil as a real power, whether as "the collective shadow, the sum total of all the individual darkness," or as "a profound *experience* of numinous, uncanny power in the psychic and historic lives of real people."

⁴⁸ Alvin Plantinga (cf. *Warranted Christian Belief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 458-99) has a dualist theodicy, complete with the fall of Lucifer and the agency of Satan, but philosophy overwhelms narrative in presenting it, and he addresses questions and defends views that are not necessarily intrinsic to the narrative that he takes to be his mandate. Gordon Graham (*Evil & Christian Ethics* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001], 161-79) defends a dualist outlook, taking the rare view that Rev 12:7-12 is the most wonderful and succinct story and its portrayal of cosmic conflict "the best available explanation for evil." Gregory A. Boyd (*Satan and the Problem of Evil: Constructing a Trinitarian Warfare Theodicy* [Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001]) argues a dualist position rooted in God's love.

⁴⁹ Russell (*The Devil*, 227-28) is profoundly sceptical with respect to any monist account of evil. In his view the argument fails "because Christianity has the virtue of taking the problem of evil seriously" to an extent that seems impossible within a monist context.

⁵⁰ Barth, *Church Dogmatics* III.3, §50, 301, 311; Wolterstorff, "Barth on Evil," 586.

contemplation."⁵¹ But the reality and power of evil seem otherwise vastly to exceed what his own negative categories can sustain and what is own dialectic, for all its rich and enchanting allure, is capable of endowing with verisimilitude.⁵² Like Revelation, Moltmann's theology of the cross leads beyond "the limits of the doctrine of salvation," seeking a larger frame of reference, described as "the revolution needed in the concept of God."⁵³ Going beyond the traditional concern for personal salvation,⁵⁴ Moltmann presents what is essentially a theodical reading of the cross. And yet, despite the appeal of a God who identifies with the most abject form of suffering, including the sense of abandonment by God, the argument is dependent on a dialectic that threatens to blow asunder the monist frame.⁵⁵ The God who solves the problem, even by stooping

⁵¹ Wolterstorff, "Barth on Evil," 599.

⁵² In his account of evil in *Church Dogmatics* III.3, §50-51, Barth's dialectic, never slack, is dizzying. Evil is nothingness, but it is not nothing. It "is only on the left hand of God, under His No," and it exists "only in its own improper way, as inherent contradiction, as impossible possibility" (p. 351-52). Nothingness owes its existence to God, and yet it "is that which God does not will" (p. 352). Barth draws a line between what "God positively wills" and "what God does not will and therefore negates and rejects," assigning nothingness to the latter category (p. 353). As with *das Nichtige*, the devil and demons "are null and void, but they are not nothing" (p. 523). They belong to a third class because "God has not created them, and therefore they are not creaturely" (p. 523). Whether *nothingness* thus conceived can be the power that evil is said to be in Barth's system, is far from self-evident. The "left hand of God" is still God's hand, and it is peculiar that the role of the left hand will one day cease (Rodin, *Evil and Theodicy*, 259). Evil exists in order to occasion the cross (cf. David Ford, *Barth and God's Story: Biblical Narrative and the Theological Method of Karl Barth in the 'Church Dogmatics'*, [Frankfurt: Verlag Peter Lang, 1981], 75), and yet the cross does not bring an end to evil. Rodin (*Evil and Theodicy*, 234), whose view of Barth's theodicy is generally positive, makes the continuing horror of evil his chief objection: "if evil was destroyed on the cross, why is it still amongst us?" Why still the role of what is ultimately, in Barth's terminology, *nothingness*?

⁵³ Bauckham, in Moltmann, *Crucified God*, xx.

⁵⁴ Bauckham, in Moltmann, *Crucified God*, xx.

⁵⁵ According to *The Theology of Hope*, God contradicts the world on the cross but redeems it in the resurrection, creating "a dialectical concept of divine promise" (Bauckham, *Theology of Jürgen Moltmann*, 83-84). In *The Crucified God*, Moltmann takes the dialectic a step further, hinting of a contradiction within God. "It is," says Bauckham (*Theology of Jürgen Moltmann*, 86-87), "dialectical love which in embracing its own contradiction must suffer." To the extent that Moltmann and Pannenberg invoke apocalyptic as their theological framework, it is noteworthy that neither of them has any use for the cosmic dualism of apocalyptic even though this is one of its hallmarks. As William R. Murdock points out ("History and Revelation in Jewish Apocalypticism," *Int* 21 [1967], 180), the problem of revelation as history becomes acute because history, "according to apocalypticism, was not the working out of the divine plan, but was in part the expression of the demonic will." Gilbertson (*God and History*) pursues his subject as though the cosmic dualism of Revelation is discardable husk in Revelation as much as it appears to be to Pannenberg and Moltmann. If influences of apocalyptic remain, it seems fair to say,

to identify with the sufferer and absorb the suffering into God's own Person, must in some way also be the God who set the terms and allowed the problem to come about in the first place.⁵⁶ For this reason the oscillation of good and evil within Moltmann's dialectical theodicy begs for permission to fission, hardly able to constrain its fissile and fission-prone elements within the monist straitjacket.

Perhaps the point of contact that has the greatest potential between the dualism of Revelation's account and monist theodicy is found in Marilyn McCord Adams' observant, intriguing, and true to life description of the discrepancy between the scope of horrendous evil and human agency.

For in my effort to make vivid how bad horrors are, I have stressed their disproportion to human agency – how our power to produce them exceeds our capacity to shoulder responsibility for them; how they *prima facie* stump our imaginations and stalemate our attempts to defeat or even to balance them off.⁵⁷

I find Adams' perception of the gap between human agency and the magnitude of horrendous evil to be profoundly persuasive. But if such a gap is real, what is there to make up the difference? In Adams' monist framework, having found human beings to be at most only partially accountable, the only other agent is God.⁵⁸ To Adams, the missing link, so to speak, is inevitably found in "the size gap" between God and human agency where the divine agency sets the conditions and acts as the enabler.⁵⁹

Ultimately, "between created agents and the horrendous consequences of their actions

as does James Barr ("Jewish Apocalyptic in Recent Scholarly Study," *BJRL* 58 [1975], 30-31), that it is selectively applied and deployed with a creative hand that goes considerably beyond the mandate of apocalyptic texts.

⁵⁶ Cf. Charles Hefling, "Christ and Evils: Assessing an Aspect of Marilyn McCord Adams' Theodicy," *ATR* 83 (2001), 872. Although Hefling's critique addresses Adams' theodicy and although there are differences between Adams and Moltmann, the role of the cross as the means of identification with human suffering is common to both.

⁵⁷ Adams, *Horrendous Evils*, 191; cf. *idem.*, "Horrors in theological context," *SJT* 55 (2002), 473, where she refers to the problem of sin not as "misused capacity but as incompetent incapacity."

⁵⁸ 'Structural' evil might be seen as enablers, too, but this is a concept that must be handled with care if evil is depersonalized and is yet to be overcome.

⁵⁹ Adams, *Horrendous Evils*, 104, 157.

lies an intervening agent – God – who establishes the framework!”⁶⁰ The human condition and the circumstances of existence are bound to produce horrendous evils, and these evils that can only be overcome by God’s identification with human suffering and by the promise that God will provide better circumstances and enable human agency to overcome evil.⁶¹ Adams is aware that this endangers notions of freedom and accountability, and yet she sees no other way to overcome the gap. “If this should mean God’s causally determining some things to prevent everlasting ruin,” she writes, “I see this as no more an insult to our dignity than a mother’s changing a baby’s diaper is to the baby.”⁶²

Agreeing that there is a colossal discrepancy between what is attributable to human agency and the magnitude of evils, the present thesis argues that a way must be found to account for the gap other than Adams’ sanguine monist solution. It must necessarily be an answer that lies outside the monist framework altogether, an account on the order of Revelation’s portrayal of an agency other than human beings and other than God. For Revelation, as noted, the merits of its account rest on narrative and on narrative logic, oblivious to philosophical models and theological constructs that are not obligated by its view of reality. And yet unequalled explanatory power is claimed on behalf of the dualistic account of its kind, as expressed long ago by Origen, who wrote

⁶⁰ Adams, “Horrors in theological context,” 471.

⁶¹ Thus, Adams (“Horrors in theological context,” 473) asserts that “so long as horrors and vulnerability to horrors persist, God’s work is not yet done.”

⁶² Adams, *Horrendous Evils*, 157. Hefling’s critique (“Christ and Evils,” 872), referred to above with respect to Moltmann, remains in force: The God who sets the terms that must be overcome in order to fix the problem, must change the terms for the problem to be overcome. Hefling is not persuaded by the notion of God’s identification with the sufferer in Jesus, regarding it as “a restatement of the question rather than a ‘resource’ for answering it.” To him, “God incarnate is not only a fellow-sufferer who understands but one who declines to perpetuate evil” (p. 881-82). William Placher (“An Engagement with Marilyn McCord Adams’s *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God*,” *SJT* 55 [2002], 461-67), while agreeing with Adams on many points, faults her theodicy for attributing evil to human finitude, thus collapsing the categories of finitude and sin, and for failing to distinguish adequately between the perpetrators and the victims of evil.

that “no one will be able to know the origin of evils who has not grasped the truth about the so-called devil and his angels, and who he was before he became a devil, and how he became a devil, and what caused his so-called angels to rebel with him.”⁶³

On the basis of the foregoing I find sufficient ingredients to confirm and commend that Revelation should be read as a theodicy and that it remains a theodicy with which to reckon in the face of present human reality, fully competitive in the company of the monist theodicies that for the time being enjoy more theological prestige.

This conclusion should be qualified and specified with the aim of removing potential remaining misconceptions. First, reading Revelation as a theodicy does not mean that theodicy stands in opposition to soteriology or that soteriology is excluded.⁶⁴ Instead, it means only that the message of salvation is integrated within the framework of a more comprehensive story. Whether in spatial or temporal terms Revelation’s theodicy aspires to reveal the most inclusive perspective on human reality.

Second, the aspect of theodicy that stands in the foreground in the present interpretation does not take Revelation’s theodicy to have the aim of explaining the reality of evil gratuitously. If Revelation’s story belongs to the category of theodicy, the story that is told aims to direct action. What is revealed is not related only in order to explain away evil or to somehow blunt the sting of suffering by means of mere explanation. And even though there is a close connection between belief and behaviour, Revelation does not explain in order to bring about belief as such. Instead, the weight of emphasis is to guide behaviour. Discerning the reality of the cosmic conflict, the issues and the agency of the opponent, the believer must take his or her

⁶³ Origen, *Contra Celsum* 4.65.

⁶⁴ Numerous texts in Revelation have a clear soteriological emphasis; 1:5-6; 3:14-21; 13:8; 17:8; 22:11, 14, 17.

direction from the character of God. At the heart of Revelation's paranesis is *imitatio Dei*, the obligation to adopt only the stance and to pursue only the means that are compatible with the character of God. Attention to the means, then, is crucial, because the adoption of flawed means might undercut what God seeks to accomplish and ensure the triumph of evil through the back door. Drawing his lesson from the text describing the war in heaven in Revelation (12:7-12), Helmut Gollwitzer writes succinctly and eloquently,

For we resort to force even though we ought to confess that the power of good which is at our disposal, does not arise against the power of evil. Everyone has become a captive of a fateful illusion that believes itself able to drive out evil by force. In this world where we everywhere marshal force against force, we must learn that force at best may succeed in containing a few manifestations of evil, but it can never conquer or eliminate evil. On the contrary, the force with which we fight evil, has mainly the consequence that we ourselves become the victims of evil. As we resort to force against others, evil attacks us from behind and makes us evil ourselves.⁶⁵

Third, while the theodicy of Revelation looks to the slaughtered Lamb to explain the character of God (5:6) and to the events of history for the truth about the opponent to be revealed, the full appropriation of its theodicy lies in the future, awaiting the consummation. Only when God calls the dead back to life (20:13; 21:4), nullifies the curse (22:3), overcomes the estrangement (22:4), brings an end to all suffering (21:4), and wipes away all tears (7:17; 21:4), has Revelation's theodicy become a reality. In this respect Revelation conforms to P. T. Forsyth's notion of genuine theodicy.

The final theodicy is no discovered system, no revealed plan, but in an effected redemption. It is not in the grasp of ideas, nor in the adjustment of events, but in the destruction of guilt and the taking away of the sin of the world.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Helmut Gollwitzer, "Predigt über Offenbarung Johannes 12:7-12," in *Festschrift für Ernst Fuchs* (ed. G. Ebeling; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1973), 128.

⁶⁶ P. T. Forsyth, *The Justification of God* (London: Latimer House, 1948), 53; cf. Surin, "Theodicy?" 242.

Revelation's narrative, theology, and theodicy map a road to this goal. As this thesis has read the evidence, Revelation outlines a path that is not easily seen as viable, needing the revelation and the persuasion of the slaughtered Lamb in order to break the seals of incomprehension and win the allegiance of created beings. In Revelation the faithfulness of Jesus in the form of the slaughtered Lamb is the means by which God wins the war that began in heaven and the means by which believers must prevail through the climax of the cosmic conflict. This implies that the reader should see a straight line running from the slaughtered Lamb that occupies "the middle" in the heavenly realm (5:6) – the real and figurative centre of Revelation's narrative – to the meaning of ἡ πίστις Ἰησοῦ. All will turn out well for those who hang on to the endangered legacy, grounded in the faithfulness of Jesus.

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